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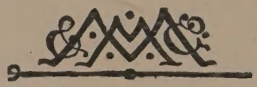
# CHRISTIAN CHARACTER



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# CHRISTIAN CHARACTER

BEING

SOME LECTURES ON THE ELEMENTS OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS

BY

J. R. ILLINGWORTH, M.A., D.D.

*Virtus est ordo amoris.*—AUGUSTINE

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# PREFACE

THE following pages contain the substance of some lectures upon Christian ethics originally delivered from notes. Their aim was simply expository: to indicate in outline the essential and permanent elements in Christian life and character. For though the emphasis laid upon particular virtues, as well as upon the means of their attainment, has varied in different periods of history and different schools of thought, the fundamental nature of the Christian character, as exhibited by its best representatives, has always remained the same. And that character has been essentially dependent upon belief in the cardinal doctrines of the Christian creed. Nowadays, however, the necessity of this dependence is denied in many quarters; while, in others, Christian ethics altogether are pronounced inadequate to modern needs. Hence



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the endeavour of the lectures was to recall the claim—the continuous claim—of Christianity to be the adequate guide of all human development, the adequate goal of all human desire, and this only on account of its further claim to be a divine revelation.

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# CHAPTER I

## LIFE THE END OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS

THE Christian life presupposes the Christian religion. When, therefore, we speak of Christian ethics, we do not mean a series of precepts, or a course of conduct which may be adopted by the adherents of any other creed, but the life which is the practical outcome of belief in the Incarnation, and which it was the object of the Incarnation to introduce into the world. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly," is Christ's account of His own purpose for the world. "I live; yet not I, Christ liveth in me," is its echo in the typical Christian experience of St. Paul.

And this life is further emphasised in the New Testament by continual contrast with the death that is its opposite. "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." There is a

reality and a universality about this antithesis, which gives it a far wider range and power of appeal than any merely ethical formula could possibly possess. It is vivid; it is concrete; it addresses all men in language that all men understand. For we know only too well that in Adam all die.

We inherit from our first human parents, whoever and whenever they were, earthly, animal bodies, and those bodies, as such, are mortal. They die, and long before dying they are darkened by the shadow of death. Grey hairs and wrinkled faces warn us of approaching age; our senses grow outwearied, and our muscles are unstrung; the physical joy of living passes slowly into pain; our familiar friends in whom we trusted vanish from us, one by one; our thoughts and ways pass out of fashion, and move the impatience of a younger world. Not a day but "things depart which never may return."

> Turn whereso'er I may,
> By night or day,
> The things which I have seen I now can see no more.

Then, when we look behind the outward aspects of life—life that is thus daily dying—we find sin; and whatever we may think of the origin, or

mystery, of sin, the fact of it remains, and the fact that the sting of death is sin. We have only to feel sin in ourselves or to watch it in others to know this. The mere outwearing of the body, to begin with, would be calmer and easier than it is, if its every tissue and function were not poisoned by the presence of sin. Gluttony and drunkenness and anger, and impurity and sloth, acting and interacting through a thousand generations, have created and spread diseases which would never otherwise have been; while pride and avarice, by exaggerating wealth and intensifying want, have increased their harm. And worse than disease of the body is mortal degradation of the heart and mind. Purity of feeling, capacity of thought, power of will—all things, in a word, that ennoble character, and make life worth living, are corrupted as sin overspreads the soul by imperceptible degrees. While, to crown all, hope, the mainspring of life's energy, and peace, the condition of life's progress, are alike destroyed by the haunting horror of remorse. Nor do we need any revelation to assure us of all this. It is the universal, sad experience of our race. *Debemur morti nos nostraque*, says the Roman poet—"We and ours are due to death."

And yet in our inmost being we resent and repudiate the thought of dying. Death in any form, parting of any kind is abhorrent to us. There is something in it which we feel to be abnormal, unnatural, untrue. All our instincts and aspirations are for larger, richer, fuller life. And when our Lord says, "I am come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly," and St. Paul, "In Christ shall all be made alive," our whole nature rises in response, and we feel that our instincts pointed true. And though the literal and obvious fulfilment of this promise must of necessity lie in the future—that future when the grave and gate of death shall have been passed—we have abundant earnest of its operation, within and around us, here and now. For we may see and feel remorse changed by the Christian spirit into repentance—"the sorrow of the world that worketh death," into "the godly sorrow not to be repented of"—issuing in assurance of forgiveness, and forgiveness in enfranchisement, power to break from evil habits and develop a new life—a life that throws off corrupting influence, and blossoms, visibly before our eyes, into "love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meek-

ness, temperance." And this, as far as it goes, is a veritable resurrection—a triumphant resurrection of spiritual life over the sin which but now threatened its destruction. Nor does the process stop even here; the new life works from within outwards: like sap through the withered branches of the wintry woods in spring. It cannot indeed immortalise the body, but it can transfigure the whole aspect of its mortality: till death itself becomes a revelation of life. For in proportion as the fruits of the Spirit overcome the works of the flesh, and holy habits of purity and temperance and energy and peace are formed, the body, from being an enemy, becomes a friend of the soul; its every member and function ministrant to the freedom of the consecrated will; a spiritual organ; an instrument of righteousness; a temple of the Holy Ghost. Its outward fashion is transformed into a living symbol of the spirit; and the gathering signs of its decay become notes of spiritual victory; the fleshly walls, as they grow frailer, showing more of the light within, and the hoary head becoming visibly a crown of glory. And though the fact of this change cannot prove to demonstration its continuance beyond the grave, it can and does create

a rational presumption of that continuance; a presumption which, to those who possess it by inward personal experience, almost amounts to demonstration, that in Christ shall all be made alive.

Life, then, is the most fundamental conception under which we can view the practical aim of Christianity; while faith and hope and love, and all other virtues and good works, are partial modes in which that life finds its inevitable issue and development, and, as such, subordinate to the central fact, the primary function which they manifest—the life itself.

Now life, among many other definitions, has been described as "the dynamical condition of an organism," the condition, that is to say, in which an organism can exercise its energies; and, analogously, one may characterise human life as the dynamical condition of a person, the condition in which a person can exercise his energies in the fullest degree.

And when we analyse our personality we find that it is ultimately spiritual; that all its complex faculties, whether of body or mind or will, are subordinate functions of a spiritual subject or self; and can never, therefore, attain their proper

perfection when independently developed; but only in ministration to their spiritual head, and in proportion as that head is, itself, in a condition to use their ministration aright. Thus an athlete or a philosopher or an ascetic will not be really developed human beings, unless the capacities of body or mind or will that they have respectively specialised are expressions of a personality behind them which is spiritually alive.

Moreover, a person has two aspects, the one individual and the other social, and his true life involves the development of both. As an individual, differing from all others, he must realise his individuality, show what is in him, bring his latent aptitudes to light, make his contribution to the progress of the world; write his poem, paint his picture, serve his generation in his own particular way; in a word, fulfil his function, which Plato so well defines as that which he alone can do or can do best. But all the while he is a social being (*φύσει συνδυαστικός, φύσει πολιτικός*, as Aristotle says); and as such he lives for and in others; his life is a response to the call of other persons, who also in their turn live for him; so that he can only realise himself through his essential dependence upon other

men—his servants, his friends, his family, his teachers, prophets, heroes, the appeal and the approval of the society for which he works. And when we probe this need of dependence upon other persons to its utmost depth, we are carried, in the last resort, to the infinite Personality of God. This, indeed, is a conclusion which not all men will admit; but it has been recognised by spiritual thinkers of every race and age; while the failure to admit it is declared by Augustine, in well-known words, to be the secret source of all human unrest: "Thou hast made us, O God, for Thyself, and we are restless till we rest in Thee."

Thus the dynamical condition, not of a mere body or mind or will, but of a person, the condition on which a person can truly realise himself, is the condition of union with God. And the Incarnation brought us more abundant life, by making a closer degree of this union possible.

And since this life consists in union with God, the Eternal Being, it is eternal. "He that hath the Son hath life." It begins here, and will, we believe, be continued hereafter; but here and hereafter it is equally eternal in its quality and kind; and its temporal everlastingness will be

but the manifestation of its spiritual eternity. Whence, though Christians do and must sustain themselves, under the trials of their present condition, by the hope of a future state, in which those trials shall have ceased, they cannot, consistently with their profession, neglect this world for the other, since their eternal life is operative within them here and now.

Christian life, then, is life in union with God, and as such essentially and fundamentally religious. But there is a universal obstacle to this union in the fact of sin. "For into a malicious soul wisdom shall not enter, nor dwell in the body that is subject unto sin." The conquest of sin therefore is the first condition of the Christian life. Sin is the disease that is killing us, and it must be removed before we can live. Hence the primary place which is occupied in Christian ethics by the consideration of sin. It must come first. Everything else must be postponed to it. It is a flaw in the foundation of human nature, which must be dealt with before any moral superstructure can be begun. Now this is in sharp contrast to the procedure of most secular systems of ethics, which usually begin by proposing principles of conduct, and postpone the

consideration of their failure to a subordinate place. And the same method is involved in any attempt to adopt Christian morality without the Christian religion. It is all-important, therefore, to emphasise the fact that the Christian attitude towards sin is the logical and necessary consequence of the whole Christian position; which is that we must live before we can be moral, and morality be a function of life; while sin attacks the very source of our life, which is union with God.

This, then, is the essence of the Christian view of sin, that it consists in alienation from God; and further, that "all unrighteousness is sin," that is to say, that vice or wrong done to our own nature, and crime or wrong done to society, only are what they are because ultimately they are sins, or acts of disobedience to God. Sin therefore is the fundamental category which includes all moral evil. And "sin is the transgression of law"; its seat, that is to say, is in the will. It is not inherent in our material body, as the Manichæans taught, or the result of ignorance, as maintained by many of the Gnostics; or to be identified with desire, as among the Buddhists; it is wilful disobedience; and bodily disorder, and moral

ignorance, and inordinate desire, though they may be predisposing conditions of sin, yet are, in the first instance, its consequences, not its causes. For just because sin resides in the will, it affects the whole, and not merely a part, of our being, since our will is our personality in action, the expression of our very self. A perverted will therefore implies a perverted or wrong personality. And as acts gradually become habitual, and one bad habit leads to another, as it invariably does, the entire personality grows more and more evil, more and more alienated from its source of life in God. And this works for death in two ways, in consequence of the twofold nature of personality. Socially the evil person becomes a harmful influence and example, making for the disturbance, the disorder, the disintegration, the ultimate destruction of society. While as an individual he undergoes a similar process of dissolution within himself. For with the loss of his spiritual self-control he loses all his inner unity. "The horses," as Plato puts it, "of the soul's chariot pull different ways." The man grows double-minded; his various faculties come in conflict with each other; and moral anarchy leads to mental distortion and physical disease. Shakespeare draws a vivid

picture of this internal discord in the well-known soliloquy of Richard the Third after his dream :

> And if I die, no soul shall pity me :
> Nay, wherefore should they, since that I myself
> Find in myself no pity for myself ?

We have been speaking hitherto of actual sin, the sins which separate men commit ; but actual sin, according to Christian teaching, has its root in original sin, the taint or tendency to sin with which the actual sin of the past has infected the whole human race. But as we here enter upon controversial ground, it may be well to pause for a moment on this question. That there is a bias or tendency to sin in human nature is a fact of experience. We feel within us, and we see around us, what has been technically termed "inordinate concupiscence," a disposition in our desires to transgress their appropriate bounds. And we can trace this same phenomenon back through every page of history, till it passes out of sight in the prehistoric past. We are further conscious that this tendency is not merely the result of our own actual sins, but is something which lies behind them, and may be called inherent in our nature, as we know it ; something with which we are born, and which may therefore

be called a malign inheritance. The real origin of this sinful tendency, like all other origins, is wrapped in obscurity, as is also the precise mode of its transmission. Creationists, Traducianists, Pre-existentionists have differed on the subject, in accordance with their different views upon the origin of the human soul. And we feel, as we read their theories, that all alike are dealing with things which lie beyond the limits of human knowledge. All that we know about the matter is the fact of our experience; and all that we can lawfully infer is that a tendency, which runs throughout all history, must also have obtained in the prehistoric past, and therefore been universal.

This, then, is what may be called the fact of original sin, based on observation and experience, as distinct from the speculations to which it has given rise. It is simply the solidarity of human nature viewed in its sinful aspect. It is a fact, moreover, which, though denied by various individuals, was widely, if obscurely, realised in the early religions of the world, as well as by many of the more thoughtful minds of Greece and Rome. But its most explicit recognition was among the Jews, in whose later religious thought it became increasingly prominent, and from whom

it passed into Christian theology, under the especial emphasis of St. Paul. "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean?" asks Job, and "What is man, that he should be clean? and he that is born of a woman, that he should be righteous?" "Behold, I was shapen in wickedness," cries the Psalmist, "and in sin hath my mother conceived me"; and as we read the vivid analysis of human nature in St. Paul's Epistle to the Romans we feel that it is true. "I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not."

But this fact of experience is quite distinct from the speculations that have gathered round it. To begin with, St. Paul, probably following Jewish authorities, implies that sin brought death upon the human race. And this looks like a contradiction of science; though we may remark in passing that it can never be demonstrated to be so; since we have not the means of knowing what the action of a sinless personality upon an otherwise mortal body might be. But whether St. Paul knew more than we do on the subject, or whether he was scientifically wrong, is practically an unimportant question; for the real,

essential point in his teaching is that the "sting of death is sin"; which need not mean more than that sin gave a character to death which it would not otherwise have possessed.

To a great extent, of course, we know this to be true from the bitter experience of our race; but it may well be true to a far greater extent than we know. For sin has obscured our whole relation to God and the spiritual world; and we can easily conceive, therefore, that, without it, we should have seen through death into its after state, much as we now look past sleep into the coming day. It would never then have been "to die and go we know not where." Its haunting horror would have vanished; and its physical process have been painless: a normal phase in the development of our spiritual life. Nor indeed can such a possibility be called purely hypothetical; for it is not without analogy even here and now, in the dying experience of many saints. But however this may be, it is with the solid fact that St. Paul is occupied, of the present implication of sin and death, and the burden which their joint inheritance lays upon our race. And of this solid fact original sin is only an element, for, in the case of all who have outlived

their infancy, it is continued, by one degree or another of actual sin. *Nos vero unusquisque fit animae suae Adam,* says the writer of the Apocrypha of Baruch—"Every man is the Adam of his own soul." Or, as Coleridge puts it, "in respect of original sin every man is the adequate representative of all men." No question, therefore, that can be raised, as to what may be called the speculative element in St. Paul's doctrine, will, in the least degree, affect the picture he draws of man's actual condition, which is our real point of practical concern. And the same may be said, still more strongly, of subsequent speculations. Theologians have disputed whether original sin should be called negative or positive, the mere loss of divine guidance, or the actual depravation of our nature, and again whether it can be imputed to us as guilt; while some have notoriously exaggerated the latter view to a degree from which reason revolts. But the very variety of these opinions is sufficient evidence that they deal with a matter of which we have no knowledge; while their discussion, by its obvious uncertainty, has tended to obscure rather than to emphasise, in many minds, the awful reality of our present experience both of sinful tendency and actual sin.

The conquest of sin, then, being the first requisite of Christian life, the Atonement necessarily, as the pledge of that conquest, stands in the forefront of Christian ethics. And this primary position cannot be surrendered in any false deference to the mystery of the subject. We cannot banish it into the background, simply because it is mysterious, and has led, in consequence, to many controversies and much misconception. For belief in the fact of the Atonement—that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself—is of the essence of the Christian faith, and it is this belief, and not its intellectual explanation, that has really influenced mankind; since the desire to make atonement, in one way or another, is as widespread a feeling among men as is the sense of sin. We find it in the great religions of the earlier world, as well as among the crude customs of uncultured races. And, though it may not have been the original motive of the world-wide institution of sacrifice, it soon became an important element therein; while in Judaism the connection of atonement with sacrifice is emphasised, and at the same time gradually spiritualised, by the progressive recognition that the true sacrifice is a broken heart and a renovated

will. And to this instinct, which had always been haunted by a sense of its own impotence, the Christian Atonement appealed as a real revelation, the divine solution of the problem which man had ever been striving ineffectually to solve. In saying this one is simply stating a fact of history—the fact that multitudes did so accept it, and have continued to accept it ever since—and that its acceptance has been the secret of the Christian life throughout the ages, the life of reconciliation to God.

But the Atonement could not thus have moved the hearts and consciences of men unless it had, in a measure, been intellectually understood. And in a measure—a sufficient measure—it is intellectually intelligible. That God loved mankind, in spite of all their sins, and in pursuance of an eternal purpose, "foreknown before the foundation of the world," took our nature upon Him in order to rescue us, at the cost of His own suffering, from sin, is a statement that we can understand. Whether we believe it or not, it is intelligible, as far as it goes; and it goes far enough, if we believe it, to elicit our love in return. Yet it does not explain wherein that rescue from sin consists—the intimate, essential

nature of the Atonement. And it may well be that, under the present limitations of our knowledge, no such explanation could be made. But it is round this point that controversy has so often raged, and counsel been so often darkened. Men have translated the doctrine of the Atonement into the favourite categories of their age—passing modes of thought which were valid for their own generation, but inadequate for another. And so the doctrine has come down to us encumbered and obscured by the obsolete methods of its bygone presentation—methods that in their day successfully emphasised its reality, but which, when retained after they have gone out of date, only make it seem to be unreal. We must remember, therefore, that belief in the fact of the Atonement has persisted, without change, behind all variations of its intellectual expression, inspiring alike the sanctity of Anselm and the penitence of Abelard, for all their divergence of view, and proving its reality, like other forces, by its manifest power in the world. It is no objection to this reality that we cannot adequately comprehend it; the objection would be greater if we thought that we could, seeing that it deals with the relation of God to moral evil, a subject which

must of necessity be among the deep things of God. But at the same time we must recognise that such knowledge as we have of it is in no way contradictory to reason. Men have found a difficulty in its vicariousness; but this difficulty vanishes before our increased realisation of the solidarity of our race. Every human person has a side, as we have seen, that is social, and can only realise himself by entering into and influencing the life of others, who reciprocally realise themselves by influencing him. And so the whole human race is intimately bound together by a connecting tissue, as we may call it, of mutual ministration; its every member serving others who live by his service, and in turn serve him. Moreover, there are degrees of service, and the extent and intensity of a person's influence varies with his greatness. The more unique his personality, the wider and deeper is its influence; which means, in other words, that men like Plato or Dante, Augustine or Luther, Rafael or Handel, live for and in a larger number of their fellow-men; while, conversely, a larger number of their fellow-men live through and in them. It is in harmony, therefore, with all human analogy, that an absolutely unique person should perform an

absolutely unique service to mankind; vicariously, not in the sense of "instead of them," but in the sense of "for their sake," while they in turn are enabled by His Spirit to appropriate His work, till, from being a thing outside them, it becomes their very own, and, in Pauline language, Christ is formed in them. The first stage in this process is man's justification, the work which he could not do, the step which he could not take for himself; while its second stage is his sanctification, which involves the appropriation of the work done for him, by the active co-operation of his own free will.

It is not our present object to enlarge upon these ideas, which have been abundantly discussed of recent years, but simply to emphasise the fact that they stand upon the threshold of all Christian practice, precisely because they condition the whole possibility of man's new life. And though terms like Atonement and Justification have a technical and abstract sound, which gives offence to many minds, the truths which they embody, so far from being abstract, are in close and concrete contact with the whole of human life. And these and kindred terms are only abbreviated formulæ, by which the Christian message may be handed

down the ages, to be expanded in its fulness for each generation afresh; notes of a score in which the music sleeps, till a master reawakens it for listening ears; the great music wherein earth's discords are resolved and melt away, in the love that passeth knowledge and the life that has no end.

## CHAPTER II

### CHARACTER THE CONDITION OF LIFE

It will be obvious that, since the Christian life begins with the reformation of the human will, it must begin with the individual, in his individual capacity, and not with groups or societies of men. And it is important to notice the necessity of this, because many secular philanthropists and moralists have appeared to think it possible to renovate society in the mass, by the improvement of its education, or the elevation of its ideal, or the amelioration of its conditions of existence, while accusing Christians of being selfishly preoccupied with the separate salvation of their own souls. For the latter charge there has indeed been much historical justification in the life and teaching of many very sincere though imperfect Christians; but that it is an utter misrepresentation of the true aim of Christianity should hardly need saying, at a time when the social and missionary responsi-

bilities of the Church are as clearly recognised, and as emphatically proclaimed as at the present day. The aim of Christianity is to convert the kingdoms of this world into the kingdoms of God and of His Christ; it is fundamentally and essentially social. But society consists of individuals, and those individuals are sinners, and sin has its seat, as we have seen, in the central function of our personality, the will. Any attempt, therefore, to improve society which does not begin with the will, and consequently with the individual, is either ignorantly superficial or consciously hypocritical. The higher we build upon an unsound foundation, the greater danger we run. The more we aggregate the victims of an infectious disease, the more we intensify its evil. And the sinful will is an unsound foundation, an infectious disease. To improve society, therefore, in any ethical sense, while leaving the sinful will unchanged, is impossible. Things like house-room, and high wages, and fresh air, and education, are worth having for their own sake, and may often predispose men to morality; but they neither make them moral nor even invariably tend in that direction; they are ethically neutral, and their value varies with the motives of the men by whom

they are used; and those motives are internal and individual things. All social reform, therefore, that is to be true and thorough must begin with the individual.

Accordingly, Christianity begins with the individual, and aims first at convincing him and curing him of sin. It is for this reason often charged with being untrue to the facts of life, as exaggerating the importance of sin. But the Christian contention explicitly is, that the importance of sin cannot be exaggerated, cannot be over-emphasised; while it is the objectors in question that, either from ignorance or interest, are untrue to the facts of life. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

And the reason of this is that man is a spiritual being, and finite spirits are as necessarily dependent upon their spiritual environment as are finite bodies upon their material environment; and that spiritual environment is ultimately God, "in whom we live, and move, and have our being." Man, therefore, can only live his true life, in union with God, and of this union sin is the one and only hindrance. Hence the place of penitence, the recognition and abandonment of sin, at the

threshold of the Christian scheme of life. There is, of course, a great difference between the man who has lived rightly from his childhood, and only needs further development in the same course, and the man who has lived wrongly, and needs conversion or total reversal of his course; and there are many degrees of character between these two extremes. But all alike have the sinful taint in them, as the best men, from their truer insight, are the first to admit. And Christian penitence springs from the recognition of this fact, and is an act of our whole personality. For it involves a rational condemnation of, and an emotional sorrow for past sin, together with a resolution of the will to do better in the time to come. Many moralists have maintained—as, for example, Kant and Spinoza—that ethical repentance, or the amendment of our will, is all that we need, and that emotion spent upon the past is wasted energy. And this might be true if sin were only the breach of an impersonal law. But behind the moral law there is, in the Christian view, a person, and a person who loves us; and sin therefore, in the last analysis, is a wounding of love, and as such must, when realised, involve emotional regret. The degree in which this

emotion is felt will indeed differ greatly in different individuals and different races; but, in one degree or another, it cannot fail to accompany the sincere conviction that God is love, while its presence is intimately connected, on the one hand with the humility, and on the other with the intensity of the Christian character.

For humility has a more important place in the Christian than in any other scheme of life, and one which is often misunderstood. Humility is not primarily concerned with our relation to other men, but with our relation to God, and springs from an intellectually true view of that relation. It is the recognition that, while we owe our existence and all our faculties to God, we have used those faculties against Him; that we have assumed a false independence of Him on whom it is the very essence of our nature, as created beings, to depend; and have consequently impaired the action of every function of our personality, to an extent that we cannot estimate, and in a way that we cannot of ourselves amend. And in proportion as we further realise that the relation which we have broken is one of love, our humility assumes a deeper hue. But there is nothing abject in all this, it is simply truthfulness;

and its result is not weakness but power, since it leads us back to dependence upon God, as the only source of human strength. And though the temper thus engendered must affect our behaviour to our fellow-men, its social aspect is secondary and subordinate; it is primarily and essentially religious—a true attitude of the individual towards God.

Again, the emotional element in penitence reacts upon the will, and intensifies our efforts at amendment of life. For love is the strongest dynamic in the world, and there is no greater stimulus to action than the sense that we have been ungrateful, or unkind, to one who loves us. The disappointed eyes, the saddened voice, that witness to the wound we have inflicted, quicken our contrition as no other influence can. And the same is the case in the religious life, when we realise that sin is an affront to love, as the pages of Christian biography abundantly prove. Reason may convict a sinner, but only feeling can create a saint.

Thus penitence places our entire personality, with its triple functions of reason, feeling, and will, in a right relation to God, and is therefore the necessary foundation of Christian character.

And the formation of character is the primary aim of Christianity, since that is the fundamental thing in life. Action may be formally and even morally correct without rendering its agent good; whereas goodness of character ensures good conduct. A man may tell the truth a hundred times, and for various reasons, without being a truthful man. But an essentially truthful man cannot but tell the truth. And so what we are is ethically more important than what we do.

This importance of character in relation to conduct is obvious when once stated, and has been recognised by all the great ethical systems, but it is tacitly ignored in much that passes muster for morality in the rough-and-ready estimate of the ordinary world. For men are very apt to lead departmental lives, and, if they do their duty in that department which meets the public eye, they are allowed higher moral rank than in fact they deserve. Thus a man may be a brave soldier, or an able statesman, or a just judge, or a skilful surgeon, or an honest merchant, and be accepted accordingly, without, all the while, being a good man. And however useful such men may be to society, and rightly recognised as such, their total effect is, in many subtle and imperceptible

ways, to lower and confuse the moral standard of the world. There is always need, therefore, for the protest that no amount of externally good conduct, however praiseworthy in itself, can take the place of a good will—a will, that is to say, which does not merely will this or that particular good action, but goodness for its own sake, goodness as such; or, in other words, a good character.

Character, moreover, is not only a deeper, but also a wider thing than conduct; for it is the source not only of right action, but also of right feeling and right thinking. Many of the more stoical moralists have depreciated the value of feeling in life, as interfering with the strictly ethical motive to do our duty for its own sake, simply because it is our duty. But this makes morality an unduly abstract thing. There are, of course, moments in every life when duty and desire are opposed, and duty must be preferred to desire. But such moments are only due to the fact that our moral development is incomplete; whereas the goal of that development is not the sacrifice of desire to duty, but the absolute coincidence of the two; when duty shall not only be done for its own sake, but desired for its own

sake—"the beauty of holiness." For there is always something harsh and repellent about duty done against the grain; and it is only when we have come to love our duty that we can perform it with natural ease; which adds an æsthetic perfection to its ethical character, making it beautiful as well as good, and so invests it with that attraction for others which the word loveliness implies. Thus the Christian character which has gradually come, by thinking on "whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are of good report," to set its affections upon things on high, not only affords security for moral conduct, but invests it with the additional attribute of grace.

Character, again, is the source of right thinking in all questions where good and evil are concerned. Of course all exercise of thought, even in such subjects as science or philosophy, presupposes a variety of qualities which are mainly emotional or moral in the thinker; such as detachment, interest, attention, veracity, perseverance, and the like. But the same is the case to a far greater degree where moral and social, and, above all, spiritual, problems are con-

cerned. We have already seen how essentially Christian life is dependent upon the elementary doctrines of the Christian creed. And the belief in those doctrines is profoundly affected, it is almost needless to say, by the character of the believer. For, however much they may be expressed in intellectual terms, for the purpose of traditional transmission, they are ultimately spiritual things, and as such must be spiritually discerned. And the power of spiritual discernment means the possession of a spiritual character. To speak of character in this way, as something fixed and apart from its manifestations, is of course to a certain extent artificial; since the daily manifestations of thought, feeling, and will react upon and develop the character, which is consequently always in a process of modification and development. Allowing, however, for this relative inaccuracy, we may still use the term "character" to describe the most permanent aspect of a person, the truest expression of what he really is, the nearest approach to his very self, that in him which is the cause of his general behaviour. And in this sense of the word we may say that the primary object of Christianity is the formation of character. Now, various schools of ethics have

endeavoured to form character by rule and precept, but Christianity stands alone in presenting a personal pattern for our standard. The Christian character has to be formed by the imitation of Christ, or the following of Christ, through the power of His Spirit. His life as pictured in the Gospels is the external example set before us; His spirit co-operating with ours is the internal power that reproduces that example in ourselves. We contemplate in the Gospels the picture of the perfect, pattern man, the living illustration of what a man thoroughly indwelt by God would be and do; and the picture is further emphasised by the familiar contrast between Christ and His great forerunner John the Baptist. John, the great ascetic, stands aloof from human life, and while this enables him to enforce his penitential message with unparalleled intensity, it removes him from sympathetic contact with those who walk in ordinary ways. But it is otherwise with Christ, who receives sinners and eats with them, and blesses a marriage, and weeps at a tomb, and goes about doing good among the accustomed haunts of men. He is universal; and every one of us, with our own "peculiar difference," may find in Him our true ideal, what we were created to

be. And this universality of His character is reflected in the universality of its record. There is a breadth and catholicity about the Gospels to which no other book can attain. All other devotional books, even the great *Imitation*, are tinged with the prejudices or the limitations of their particular author or particular age, and we need constantly to check them by going back to their great fountain-head, to

> Correct the portrait by the living face,
> Man's God by God's God in the mind of man.

In saying this we, of course, imply that there is no need to reckon seriously with the criticism which has of recent years attempted to maintain that Christ does not present us with a complete ideal of human character; but merely with an ascetic type, like that of the contemporary Essenes, which leaves no scope for art, science, commerce, and the various social and political activities that form the content of ordinary life. And this not only because the portrait in the Gospels, when fairly regarded, is conspicuously that of a man to whom nothing human, in the widest sense, is alien, but because such criticism entirely mistakes the whole point of Christ's life and work. He deals with the inner motives which are the springs of

character, and His object is to lead men to that absolute veracity, in their relation to God, which will alone make the true development of all that is within them possible. He does not prescribe the course of that subsequent development, but only its indispensable condition, union with God, since, when once that condition is attained, the true development is sure to follow of all those "diversities of gifts" wherewith human nature is endowed. And He expressly says, "when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he shall lead you into all truth. . . . He shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine,"—words which, whatever more they may include, cannot possibly be taken to exclude any natural development of those faculties in man which the Father has created. And so the common-sense of the Church has always believed. There have been puritanical reactions at times and in places against all secular life. But as a rule Christians have taken their part in the avocations of the world, as philosophers, poets, artists, men of science, men of affairs, in the deliberate conviction that it was their duty, as Christians, to use their natural talents, in reclaiming every province of human activity for Christ, and by so

doing have promoted and ennobled the whole progress of mankind. And where doubt has existed about the lawfulness of particular professions, such as the army or the stage, for Christians, it has been only on the ground that such professions were in themselves illegitimate—a point with which we are not at present concerned.

But in reality there is a presupposition behind the criticism in question, and that is the rejection of the divinity of Christ, and of the Gospel in which it is especially emphasised. And if Christ is viewed as a mere man, though He may be an example, as other heroes are, He cannot, of course, be the great exemplar to which all other men should conform their lives. "Imitation," says Kant, "has no place in morals"; and this is true in the sense that we cannot sacrifice our individuality to become copies of another, or do things simply because another has done them; because "it was my father's custom, and so it shall be mine." This would lead us no higher than that customary morality (ἔθος ἄνευ φιλοσοφίας) which is only the rudimentary stage of ethical life. We must be ourselves and not another; nor can any mere man, with the necessary limitations of his age and situation, ever be an adequate model for all other

men. When, therefore, the imitation of Christ is proposed to Christians as their aim, it can only be in the full conviction that He is "the light that lighteth every man, coming into the world"; divine, that is, as well as human, and capable, therefore, through His divine universality, of focussing all individual ideals in himself; like a mirror in which each man may see his own true destiny reflected; so that in imitating Him we do not sacrifice, but realise our own personality. In other words, He is not only the transcendent example but the immanent principle of all our lives; enabling us by His spirit to reproduce the character which He exemplified on earth, in such a way and degree as our own individuality and circumstances permit; and so to become, through Him, our proper selves, that which we were created to be. It is thus only because Christ is divine that the imitation of Christ has ethical significance.

It naturally follows from the aim of the Christian being the imitation of Christ, that the standard put before him is perfection. "Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect," is the injunction of the Sermon on the Mount; and "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father,"

supplies the condition of its fulfilment. Not that such perfection is possible of attainment within the limits of an earthly lifetime, with all its subjection to sin. A few enthusiastic sects have indeed thought otherwise, but they have never received the approval of the Church at large. Perfection is a far-off goal that we can only hope to reach in the world where all things are made new, but none the less the command to seek it gives its tone and tenor to the whole Christian life. For the majority of men are contented with a relative standard of conduct, a level that they can reach, a law that they can fulfil :

> That low man seeks a little thing to do,
> Sees it and does it.

And perhaps the most widely popular systems of ethics have always been those which have sanctioned, or seemed to sanction, such a course. But though such relative standards may have had their place in the lower stages of civilisation, they can never promote the spiritual development of mankind. For it needs great ideals to create great realities :

> This high man, with a great thing to pursue,
> Dies ere he knows it.

And the Christian ideal of perfection is the

highest that we can conceive. As such, it involves us at once in perpetual penitence and perpetual progress; penitence, because, judged by such a standard, we must always feel ourselves to be unprofitable servants; and progress, because, for this very reason, we must always strive after something better than we have yet attained; like mountain-climbers to whom each summit gained discloses a farther and a higher peak. Spiritual idealism of this kind is apt to be resented by the ordinary mind, precisely because of the penitential element that it involves—the dissatisfaction with ourselves that must always disturb our comfort—and hence it is often called unpractical. But if progress be our object, such idealism is the most practical of all things, since it is the only condition that makes progress possible, and distinguishes true progress from false. For much goes by the name of progress which is nothing more than process, or change from one state of things to another, without any intrinsic gain, the mere result of that Western restlessness which the Eastern mind so profoundly disdains. But change inspired by a spiritual ideal is always to a nobler state, whether in the character of the individual or the condition of the race. And when we look

below the surface of what is called the history of civilisation, it is not difficult to see that the natural genius of the progressive peoples, of which political philosophers are wont to speak, would never have lifted us to our present level, far as that is from what it still should be, without the perpetual inspiration of the Christian ideal of perfection ; pale and weak as it has often seemed, before the opposition raised against it, but only with the pallor of that self-sacrifice whose weakness is stronger than the strong. In saying this, one does not forget that the pursuit of perfection has at times been carried on in imperfect ways. For ideal principles have to be translated, for popular assimilation, into laws and rules that can be definitely observed ; and this often leads men, especially in rude states of society, like the dark ages, to lower their morality into legality, and think less of their internal motives than of their external obedience. And in the same way, though on a higher plane, in their very desire for perfection, men have often forgotten its true nature, as an unearthly ideal, beckoning them ever onward to endeavour without end ; and have attempted to realise it in some state or practice that could be actually attained. This led, for example, to

the adoption of "counsels of perfection," such as the three monastic vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience; with the implication that secular life was, as such, inevitably less perfect; or again, to those extreme forms of asceticism which sought personal security in the destruction rather than the discipline of the bodily powers; or again, to that general tendency to retire from the world and its temptations which has often been thought to savour more of the Stoic and Epicurean precepts of apathy and indifference than of the Christian commandment of love. And there is an undoubted element of truth in the criticism that the perfection thus obtained was mainly negative; absence of discord rather than presence of harmony, emptiness rather than fulness of life. Yet this is far from being the whole truth. For these things, after all, were forms of heroism, which it is easier to criticise than to imitate; efforts to attain perfection in too external or mechanical a way, but efforts none the less, and tremendous efforts, to attain perfection. And one might, in this respect, draw a parallel between scientific and spiritual life. For as science grows by subdivision among specialists, who are individually the poorer for their specialisation, yet

thereby contribute to the progress of the rest, so men like Antony, or Benedict, or Francis, have been specialists in the spiritual life; each isolating some one attribute or aspect of perfection, the better to impress it on an imperfect world, and so keeping the great ideal before the eyes of men. Indeed, when one remembers their historic context, and the coarse materialism with which they had to contend, one may be inclined to believe that their actual methods were, after all, the most effectual that they could have adopted; while the later standard, by which they are sometimes criticised, is one which those very methods have contributed to raise. Meanwhile, on the point that we have been considering in the present chapter, their witness is of permanent worth: the importance of personal holiness, the necessity, at all costs and by all means, of possessing our own souls and fashioning our own characters aright, as the one and only foundation of all further Christian work.

# CHAPTER III

## DISCIPLINE THE MEANS OF DEVELOPMENT

THE fact that the aim and object of Christianity is life, and life whose goal is nothing less than perfection, may help us to see the fallacy of the contrast which is often drawn between self-sacrifice and self-development as ethical ideals. For self-sacrifice is often mistaken to be the end of the Christian life, instead of the necessary means to its end, and then unfavourably contrasted with the Greek or classical ideal of self-development, which notably reappeared at the Renaissance, and in modern times has been often associated with the name of Goethe. And there is, on the face of it, much plausibility in this contention. For self-assertion, in the strict sense of the term, or self-affirmation, is a fundamental instinct of our personality. It is simply the desire to live, which, when thought out, implies the development of our various capacities, with a

corresponding enlargement of their opportunities for action; the emphasis, the expansion, the realisation of all that we have it in us to become. We cannot help feeling that such self-affirmation is natural, normal, healthy; rooted and grounded in the truth of our being; a thing that we desire for ourselves, and admire when seen in others, poets, painters, soldiers, statesmen, men who, as we say, have made their mark in the world. Nor is the influence of this ideal of self-development by any means confined to those who have deliberately adopted it as an alternative to the Christian scheme of life. For it is often present, as an undercurrent, within the Christian sphere; an instinct of protest, in the name of physical or intellectual truth, against the necessity for self-renunciation, which, without being explicitly accepted, yet in many a critical moment of inner history arises, with its "sinister claims for liberty of heart and thought,"[1] to neutralise the proper action of the soul.

It is well, therefore, to bear in mind that, from the Christian point of view, the pursuit of such an ideal is not false in the abstract, but only, under our present circumstances, fatally premature,

[1] Pater, "Ancussin and Nicoletta," *q.v.*

because it ignores the existence of sin. The self which we seek to develop is, here and now, a sinful self, and incapable, therefore, till its sin is overcome, of any true development at all. Its so-called self-development is really self-indulgence, and must lead to that progressive deterioration of character which self-indulgence involves. It is not progress, but retrogression however speciously disguised, and inevitably withdraws us from that union with God which we have seen to be the condition of all real life. The awful epilogue of Greek culture was written for all time by St. Paul, and every subsequent revival of its ideal has issued in one degree or another of its dark result.

But when, seeing this, we recognise the necessity, before all else, of overcoming sin, we are obliged to forego all thought of symmetrical completeness in our present life. Self-denial, mortification, crucifixion to the world, cutting off of our right hand, plucking out of our right eye, are among the phrases in which the New Testament describes the conflict with sin. And such things imply a mutilated life, a life in which only a part of our personality may permissibly be realised. But, on the other hand, this partial realisation is conducted upon true lines: it is in

union with God, and therefore, even as regards this world, infinitely more effective than its godless rival. The simplest saint, with all his limitations, is a greater personality than the most splendid sinner. And, further, "man has forever." The Christian views his present and future life as one continuous whole, and acts with deliberate reference to the world beyond the grave; not as a state in which the self-denial of this life will be arbitrarily rewarded by its opposite, but a state in which it must bear its natural, its inevitable fruit; for it will have been the means of overcoming the sin which hinders union with God, and that union once complete must assure the development of all our powers.

> If such his soul's capacities,
> Even while he trod the earth—think now,
> What pomp in Buonarrotti's brow,
> With its new palace-brain where dwells
> Superb the soul, unvexed by cells
> That crumbled with the transient clay!
> What visions will his right hand's sway
> Still turn to form, as still they burst
> Upon him? How will he quench thirst
> Titanically infantine,
> Laid at the breast of the Divine?

In a word, Christianity enables the truest self-development that is possible in this life, and promises its completion hereafter.

And this may lead us to see the true place of asceticism in Christianity, which is never to be an end in itself, but only a means to an end. Manichæanism, and all kindred systems of thought, which regard matter, and therefore the body, as intrinsically evil, tend to make asceticism an end in itself. They view the body, with all its appetites, as an enemy, to be as far as possible destroyed, and consequently attach a positive merit to its destruction; further encouraging the morbid tendency that is sometimes found in human nature to take a voluptuous delight in pain. The revolting austerities of the Indian fakirs are, of course, the best-known examples of these perverse opinions, which, for all their wonderful exhibition of endurance, degrade instead of elevating human nature. And there can be no question but that Christian practice has, often in its history, been contaminated and compromised by the taint of these Eastern ideas.

But for all this there is a distinctively Christian asceticism which moves upon a far higher plane, and is enjoined by Christ Himself. "If any man will come after me," He says, "let him deny himself," importing an ascetic element at the outset into every Christian life. And then he

gives the rule and reason for this self-denial. "If thy right eye causeth thee to stumble, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body be cast into hell. And if thy right hand causeth thee to stumble, cut it off, and cast it from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not thy whole body go into hell." Here is no slur cast upon the material world and the bodily life. On the contrary, it is obviously implied that completeness—the possession of two eyes and two hands—is the preferable condition, and that incompleteness is a lower alternative (Aristotle's δευτερὸς πλοῦς), but a necessity in consequence of our tendency to sin. And so we find St. Paul saying, "I keep under my body"—"I bruise my body severely" would be nearer the meaning of the Greek—"and bring it into subjection: lest . . . I myself should be a castaway." Thus Christian asceticism is primarily prudential. It springs from no underestimate of the goodness of God's creation, but simply from the recognition of man's tendency to sin, and consequent need for the avoidance of temptation. He cannot trust himself, and so he must fly. But the man

who feels this must be humbled by the feeling. Hence the Christian ascetic is as far removed as possible from all thought of accumulating merit by his austerities. They result expressly from his demerit, and are a perpetual reminder of its existence. And for the same reason he can attach no positive value to pain for its own sake. He simply accepts it from prudential motives as a means to an end.

We are accustomed to confine the term asceticism to those whose lives express the ascetic principle in more than an ordinary degree; but it is obvious that the principle itself, as above described, is an essential element in every Christian life. But besides this, its prudential or rational aspect, which is incumbent, in one degree or another, upon all, Christian asceticism has also a penitential or emotional aspect, which is more individual and voluntary, but has played an important part in the spiritual history of the world. For in proportion as a man of feeling realises that his sins have wounded One who loves him, he will desire to express his emotional sorrow by, in some way, punishing himself, not as a matter of moral obligation, but as a necessity of love. And this has been a frequent and

powerful motive in the asceticism of Christians, though one which, from its nature, has varied widely with the variations of personal temperament and race.

Prudence, therefore, and love are the springs of Christian asceticism, which thus differs profoundly from its Oriental counterpart. But, historically, the difference has not always been maintained. For the first great outburst of Christian asceticism in Egypt occurred at a time and place where Oriental influence was rife; and, either from this influence or from its own exaggeration, often became fanatical, and false to the Christian ideal. The movement was needed. It was a great protest against the sensuality of the pagan world, an object-lesson that required strong colour and incisive words to force it home; but, like all great protests made by imperfect men, it mingled error with its truth. The body came to be viewed and treated in a way that was practically Manichæan. Physical and moral austerities were pushed to an extremity which often defeated its own object, and intensified the temptations which it sought to avoid; while the idea of thus acquiring merit insidiously crept in; and the moral atmosphere of the Thebaid

became very different from that of the New Testament. Tennyson's picture of St. Simeon Stylites, with its strange mixture of pagan and Christian sentiment, is typical of much that may still be read in the lives of the hermits of the desert. And their mediæval followers, in emulating their virtues, often imitated their faults; with the natural result of provoking that reaction against all asceticism which characterised the Renaissance. But *abusus non tollit usum*—the misuse of a thing does not disprove its utility. We must never forget that the ascetic principle is an essential ingredient in Christian character, however much the mode of its exhibition may vary in different places and times; while, as a practical safeguard in its application, we may take warning from the errors of the past, and remember that it must never be viewed otherwise than as a means to an end, nor inspired by other motives than prudence and love.

And what is true of asceticism, or voluntary self-discipline, is equally true of that other discipline which comes to all of us without our seeking—sickness, pain, bereavement, sorrow, and all the minor cares which go to constitute

the cross that we are bidden daily to take up. The suffering of these things is never to be viewed as an end in itself, or sought for its own sake; but, on the other hand, it is, in one degree or another, an indispensable means towards our real end, which is the formation of a character in union with God. For, however much pessimists, like Schopenhauer and Hartmann, may rail at the suffering, as distinct from the sin, that is in the world, it is an incontestable fact of experience that suffering can fashion human character as nothing else can do. Bacon and Shakespeare are no mean authorities where a knowledge of human nature is concerned; and we are all familiar with Shakespeare's "Sweet are the uses of adversity," while Bacon forcibly says, "The blessing of the Old Testament was prosperity, but the blessing of the New Testament is adversity." "That misery does not make all virtuous," says Dr. Johnson, "experience too clearly informs us; but it is no less certain that of what virtue there is, misery produces far the greater part." These are not the words of morose fanatics, but of thoughtful men of the world. And an equally impartial modern moralist makes the striking observation that "the older men grow in life, the more work

becomes their real play, and suffering their real work." [1]

We cannot help feeling at times that there are deeper reasons for this than we yet understand; but at the same time those which we can understand are very plain. In the first place, self-will is the root of all the sin that we have to overcome; and the patient acceptance of events which conflict sharply with our self-will is often a more powerful remedy for it than even voluntary self-denial, since it involves a greater effort, and is less liable to be tainted by any admixture of pride, which has so often in the history of asceticism brought back the old self in a new form. It is therefore the best cure for self-will. But, further, the Christian, as such, believes in a particular providence, and therefore that his misfortunes represent not merely the incidence upon him of general laws, but God's personal will for him in particular. Their acceptance, therefore, is a direct acquiescence in God's will, a union of the will with God. And further again than this, it is in times of trouble that men most immediately feel their need of divine assistance. And this leads them to prayer, wherein not the

[1] J. Mozley.

will only, but their whole personality, seeks union with God—seeks it, and, as those alone know who have so sought it in the way of sorrows, finds it in a degree that language has no power to express. "It is good for me that I have been in trouble," says the Psalmist, "that I might learn thy statutes." "Before I was troubled, I went wrong: but now have I kept thy testimonies."

And this is the universal verdict of the religious consciousness. Nor is even this all. Suffering borne in the Christian temper has often incidental effects upon character. For it induces tenderness, and strength, and spirituality of life. The man who has suffered much has a keener insight into the sufferings of others, and therefore a more appreciative sympathy for them. His very voice and glance and touch gain a magnetic power from his pain. Nor is this tenderness purchased at the cost of weakness, for suffering indurates and strengthens the entire person. Under all his apparent weakness the man of sorrows is strong. And thus his own sorrow helps him to alleviate the sorrow of the world; while, beside thus enhancing his social efficiency, suffering refines and purifies the inner man, as a

necessary consequence of the closer communion with the spiritual world to which it calls him.

It is thus a simple fact of experience that, in our present sinful state, pain and sorrow are among the most powerful factors in the development of character. And as they can only be so when accepted in the right spirit, it is a part of our Christian duty so to accept them. They must be recognised, when they come, as normal elements, and not abnormal interruptions, of our religious life, and welcomed accordingly, as far as possible, in the spirit of St. James, who bids us "count it all joy when we fall into divers trials," on account of their educative effect. But it will be obvious that this spirit is wholly different from the fatalistic apathy of the East, which acquiesces without effort in the course of adverse events. For a Christian cannot regard anything as unavoidable, and therefore plainly sent by God, which honest effort will enable him to avoid. The mere fact of trouble coming in his way therefore lays no obligation upon a man to endure it, in any case where by honest effort it may be alleviated or removed. On the contrary, this very effort is one of our natural springs of action, and when made for the sake of others, as in the

case of medical or social science, is among the noblest uses of our free will.

But the legitimacy of this effort ceases the moment that it involves a breach of any moral law. It is the duty of a Christian to suffer rather than commit sin. He may not, for example, to take an extreme instance, commit suicide to escape shame or pain, as both the Stoic and Epicurean thought it right to do. And the same principle should regulate the minor details of daily life, on which no general law can be laid down. Suffering that can only be escaped by sin should be accepted as the will of God, and so accepted cannot fail to ennoble character. Nor is this effect of pain upon character only of practical significance. For the very fact that it has such an effect throws light upon our theory of the world, and tends to confirm our faith. And this in turn, since faith and practice act and react intimately upon one another, gives additional confidence to our practice. For the existence of suffering, and especially its frequent incidence upon the innocent, is, next to the existence of evil, the greatest moral problem that the world presents, and one which is continually urged as an argument against the goodness of God. But

when we find that suffering, in the only region where we can really test it, so far from being evil, frequently is, and always may be, instrumental in the production of good, this argument falls to the ground. It is true that the difficulty of animal suffering remains, and must remain, since we can never view animal as we can human life from the inside. But even here we may derive some help from the above considerations. Since it is logically sound to conclude that, if a phenomenon which occurs in two cases, and appears at first sight in both to be evil, turns out, in the only one of the two cases where it can be tested, to be good, it may presumably be so in the other, though in a way that our inevitable ignorance forbids us to explain.

Or, to put the case in another way, man's condition in the world presents an insoluble problem, except upon one hypothesis. For he cannot help believing that he exists for a purpose. Every instinct of his nature compels him so to do. And yet when he looks round him for evidence of that purpose, he is everywhere baffled and perplexed. He has capacities for pleasure, but they conduct him to pain. He desires knowledge, but is limited to ignorance. And if he works for the

improvement of his race, his work is hampered on every side, while he sees the men most qualified for usefulness continually cut off in their prime. Neither pleasure nor knowledge nor achievement, then, can be the destined end of man upon earth. And if there is no further alternative, his instincts deceive him, and he exists in vain. But once adopt the hypothesis that the world is a school of character, and everything falls into its place in the scheme. He has pleasure enough, and knowledge enough, and achievement enough, here to suggest what possibilities hereafter may await him; while the pain and doubt and frustration that hinder his present progress may be fashioning his character for future use.

> What if the breaks themselves should prove at last
> The most consummate of contrivances
> To train a man's eye, teach him what is faith.[1]

> The thing that seems
> Mere misery, under human schemes,
> Becomes, regarded by the light
> Of love, as very near, or quite
> As good a gift as joy before.[2]

Thus the only theory of the world which, as a rational hypothesis, seems tenable is the one that, on other grounds, the Christian believes to be

[1] R. Browning, "Bishop Blougram." [2] *Ibid.* "Easter Day."

true. And this coincidence of his belief with rational probability gives additional confidence to all his practice.

Briefly to resume, then, what we have been saying: life is man's destiny, but he now starts with a taint of death in him, and that taint must be removed before his true nature can expand. Hence the negative part of Christian ethics must of necessity come first in the order of thought—penitence and self-denial and the surrender of self-will. But the very fact that these things come at the beginning implies that they are not the end. On the contrary, they are only the means to an end which is their very opposite—negative means to a positive end, which is fulness of life.

Moreover, both the necessity of these means and the nature of their end must be equally borne in mind, if Christian conduct is to maintain its due proportion. For the desire for premature self-development, that we have seen to be so much in the air, not infrequently misleads Christians at the present day into emphasising the end of their religion, to the exclusion of its necessary means. They dwell upon the fulness of life, which is their ultimate aim, and forget that its means of

attainment must, in part at least, be ascetic. Asceticism, indeed, is often confused with its most notorious exaggerations in the past, as a thing which the modern world has outgrown; and with it the note of severity, the spirit of discipline, vanishes from view. Yet asceticism, in its proper sense, is a thing of no one time or place, but an essential ingredient in all true human life. The form of its manifestation may differ in different ages, and its details may vary with the varieties of men, as symbolised in the distinction between plucking out the eye and cutting off the hand or foot. Its practice may strike the public eye, like the light of a candle set in a candlestick, or be hidden in the secret chamber, beneath the anointed head and washen face. But its spirit is always the same, and always needful in a sinful world, as the indispensable condition of entering into life.

But, on the other hand, the nature of our end must always be kept in view, as qualifying every means of its attainment. And when we say that the aim of Christianity is life, the present life as well as the future is implied. Consequently this life must never be regarded as merely an ascetic and penitential preparation for another, as has

sometimes been the case in the history of the Church. On the contrary, the Christian is promised "an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions." He is to regain by spiritual appropriation all and more than all the things whose material possession he has foregone. And so the mission of Christianity is not merely to preach Christ to all men, but to win humanity in all its phases, its science and philosophy, its literature and art, its society and policy, its every activity to Christ. Christian asceticism, therefore, should be of a kind that is compatible with this; not retirement from the manifold responsibilities of life, but such self-discipline as may the better enable us, with safety, to fulfil them. And this caution is not unneeded, even in the present day, which is far from being conspicuous for any austerity of life at all. For there is still a minority of men who recognise the importance of penitence and self-denial and cheerful acceptance of the trials of life. And those who do so are often driven, by the very fact of the adverse character of the age, to fall back for their practical guidance upon bygone models, either in the primitive or

mediæval Church. They have need, therefore, to remember that those periods in which asceticism rose to be almost a passion were not without the defects—and those grave defects—of their virtues; and that, however much we may be stimulated by the heroism of their example, we are bound, before we copy it, to criticise their conduct by the larger light of our later age.

# CHAPTER IV

## FAITH AND HOPE

We can now turn from the negative side of the Christian character to its positive content; from the evil of which it is exclusive, to the good which it includes. When Christian moralists first began to systematise their ethical doctrine, they adopted the four cardinal virtues, as they are called, from Greek philosophy—justice, prudence, temperance, and fortitude—and supplemented them by the three specifically Christian graces, faith, hope, and charity, which were subsequently named theological virtues; thus making seven heads under which the different elements of character and conduct might be arranged. And though mystical numbers may have lost their fascination for us, the classification is time-honoured, and convenient for its purpose, and may therefore with advantage be retained. These two groups of virtues have been sometimes called respectively masculine and

feminine, on the ground that the latter are more frequently conspicuous in women and the former in men. And though there is more epigram than accuracy in the distinction, it points to a truth. But to say, further, that Christianity has given pre-eminence to the feminine over the masculine type of character is profoundly untrue. What it has really done has been to make human character complete. For ancient civilisation, from its inadequate estimate of the dignity of womanhood, was necessarily one-sided in its moral development, since it omitted to include the more distinctively feminine characteristics in its ideals of life. And Christianity, by restoring woman to her true place, and consequently enabling her to exercise her true influence, rectified this error; not by substituting one type for another, but by exhibiting, for the first time, a complete type of what human character should be—"a new creature," in which, as in its great Exemplar, tenderness and strength were alike combined. "There can be no male and female," says St. Paul, "for ye are all one man in Christ Jesus." And in this character faith, hope, and charity have the primary place, not as special virtues, like justice or fortitude, but as spiritual dispositions which penetrate the

entire personality and qualify its every thought and act.

First of these comes faith; and faith, to begin with, has a natural basis. For the greater part of our life is governed by belief in facts which we have not personally verified, and trust in people whom we have not personally tested. We think we live by sense and reason, but as a matter of fact we live largely by faith, which we only fail to recognise as such because it is instinctive and habitual. Religious faith, therefore, is only the extension to the unseen of a faculty that we normally exercise every day of our life. It is broadly defined in the Epistle to the Hebrews as "the assurance of things hoped for, the proving of things not seen." And the subsequent illustrations of it show this assurance to be essentially practical. It is thus, though based upon belief, and all the reasons which make for belief, much more than mere belief, which may mean only an intellectual conviction; for it implies readiness to act, to make ventures on the strength of our conviction; it is practical belief or trust—trust in the spirituality of the world. Thus, in this its widest sense, it is the opposite and antidote to materialism. And though speculative materialism is hardly so common to-day

as in some other ages, practical materialism of life is probably more so. For, as a generation, we are mentally preoccupied with the physical aspect of the world, its material evolution, and the practical adaptation of its forces to our use. And the atmosphere which this preoccupation creates is apt to blind our spiritual vision. Hence, over and above those who now, as of old, "live after the flesh," there are large classes of men in the present day who, without being immoral, are unspiritual, and their existence affects the tone of the age. Hence faith has in the present day to begin, so to speak, at the beginning. It has not merely to grasp the specifically Christian doctrines, but it has to re-create the atmosphere in which those doctrines move. It has to keep in mind that evolution is but the method of creation and does not supersede a Creator; and that mechanism is everywhere and always the instrument of spiritual purpose, from the nerves and brain that subserve our will, to the earthquake and the pestilence that call us to our account. Faith sees the Divine omnipresence to which materialism is blind; Christian faith further recognises it as the presence of a Father. For the Fatherhood of God is the fundamental thought of the Sermon on the Mount.

"Ye shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." "Thy Father which seeth in secret shall recompense thee." "Your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask." "After this manner therefore pray ye: Our Father which art in heaven."

Nor is this only the teaching of Jesus Christ, for precept and practice with Him are one. What He taught in word He exhibited in deed. His whole human life is one long reference to His Father. "I must be about my Father's business." "I am not alone, for the Father is with me." "O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee, but I have known thee." "Father, not as I will, but as thou wilt." "Father, forgive them." "Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit." "I ascend unto my Father." In work, in solitude, in prayer, in suffering, in ultimate triumph, the same confidence remains, as our example of what the perfect human life should be. And the same thought is only presented to us from another point of view when we are bidden to become as little children. For the distinctive characteristic of childhood, with all its faults, is trust. A child trusts his father's knowledge to instruct him, his father's power to protect him, and his father's love

as justification of his trust. And so our trust in God's Fatherhood should free us from anxiety. "Why are ye anxious . . . O ye of little faith . . . for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."

Nor does Christ merely enjoin this faith, He bases it on an appeal to our reason. First, to a popular audience, early in His ministry, He argues from the beauty and adaptation of the world and the moral character of man. "Consider the lilies of the field . . . Solomon in all his glory was not clothed like one of these." "Consider the ravens . . . your heavenly Father feedeth them." "If ye being evil know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him." While the reasonableness of this trust is further emphasised by an appeal to the plain fact of our incapacity without it. "Which of you by being anxious can add one cubit to his stature?" As creatures it is our obvious wisdom to trust our Creator.

Then comes the later stage in His ministry, when, addressing the inner circle of disciples that He had trained to know Him, Christ appeals to the evidence of His own words and works as

being the express revelation of His Father. "I am in the Father, and the Father in me." "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father." And this is followed by the further promise that His Spirit should interpret those words and works to them, as they grew able to bear it. "He shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you."

And the result of this process is the Christian faith, in its objective sense, the truths which the Christian Church has embodied in its belief or creed. It is grounded, as we have seen, on evidence of various kinds, from intellectual inference to spiritual illumination, "the witness of the Spirit." We are not now, however, concerned with that evidence, but with the character that results from its acceptance—the faithful character. And in considering this we must not separate faith and obedience, or faith and works, as was done in the days of bygone controversy with disastrous result. For though faith in the abstract is not obedience, faith in the concrete, as resident, that is, in a person, is inseparable from obedience, and must issue in works. For this is its distinctive note; it is not mere belief, but such belief as leads us to have confidence in God—confidence in what He is to us, and does for us, and asks of us, with the

necessary implication of a response on our part. And when we speak of a living or lively faith, we mean a faith by which we live in conscious response to God's love and its demands upon us; trusting Him for to-morrow because we know that we are obeying Him to-day. Hence we are said to be justified by faith. Justification by faith implies that, being sinful, we cannot justify ourselves, we cannot render ourselves just or holy in the sight of God by anything either ceremonial or moral that we do simply of our own accord; but that if we believe in God's fatherly love for us, and consequent atonement for our sins; if we appropriate by faith the fact that "this is the will of God, even our sanctification," and therefore endeavour actively to respond to His will, we are justified in the sight of God, because He, who sees the end in the beginning, can see that we are in the course of being ultimately sanctified. We cannot abolish our own sins, but we can trust His will to abolish them for us, and live accordingly "in confidence towards God." Thus the point that underlies this famous phrase is not any distinction between faith and works, but the fact that it is God who justifies us, and not we ourselves; that it is "God which worketh in" us "both to will

and to work, for His good pleasure." And justifying faith therefore may be most simply described as the realisation of our union with God; as the source alike of all our power, the secret of all our peace, and the earnest of that day when "we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is." Faith is thus the essential foundation of our Christian life; all the conflict with sin that we have described above, and all the virtues that we pass on to consider, deriving their possibility and their efficacy from its existence.

But while thus considering what Christian faith should be, and is, in its highest representatives, one must remember that it may exist, and yet be real faith, at a lower level. For as long as faith is not sight, it will need not only to be acquired but to be maintained by an effort, whose strenuousness cannot but fluctuate in the majority of men; while the very method of its education is through trials and temptations that few can hope to surmount with their serenity entirely unscathed. Hence, while the secure faith of those whom we regard as saints must always be the Christian ideal, many lives which fall far short of this may yet be lives of faith, and bear fruit whereby they can be recognised as such.

The more of doubt, the stronger faith, I say,
If faith o'ercomes doubt. How I know it does?
By life and man's freewill, God gave for that!
To mould life as we choose it, shows our choice.
. . . . . .
What matter though I doubt at every pore—
Head-doubts, heart-doubts, doubts at my fingers' ends,
Doubts in the trivial work of every day,
Doubts at the very bases of my soul
In the grand moments when she probes herself—
If finally I have a life to show,
The thing I did, brought out in evidence
Against the thing done to me underground
By hell and all its brood, for aught I know?
I say, whence sprang this? shows it faith or doubt?
. . . . . .
With me faith means perpetual unbelief
Kept quiet like the snake 'neath Michael's foot,
Who stands calm just because he feels it writhe.[1]

The condition thus described by Browning is hardly that of those who "declare plainly that they seek a country"; "of whom the world was not worthy"; it is not the royal confidence that inspires martyrdom. But, in an age like our own, when men are often tried by intellectual distress, as severely as were their forefathers by physical persecution, it is a state that must appeal to many Christians; and they need not doubt that it is a state of faith, and of very real faith, since it continues true throughout, at least to the aspiration

[1] "Bishop Blougram's Apology."

for things hoped for; and out of that aspiration assurance ultimately comes, and satisfies the practical test of St. James, "Shew me thy faith by thy works."

This leads us on to the thought of hope; and important as hope always is to the Christian character, it is perhaps especially important to-day. For when materialism, which we have seen to be now so common, attempts to frame a scheme of life, it inevitably fails either to succeed or satisfy: and its failure leads to pessimism, a conviction that the world is wholly evil, whether it be the theoretic pessimism of the philosopher who counsels suicide without committing it, or the practical pessimism of the disappointed worldling who so often acts the counsel out to its bitter end. This temper is painfully prevalent in the moral atmosphere of the present day, and we have therefore much need of hope. For as faith is the especial counter-agent of materialism, so the counter-agent of pessimism is hope. Like faith, this has a natural basis, which is commonest and strongest in the young. But this natural hopefulness, which varies with temperament, can only be confirmed into Christian hope "by the power of the Holy Ghost." For the mere natural hopeful-

ness of a sanguine disposition fades, when the troubles of life thicken with advancing years, as "the clouds return after the rain." "But tribulation," says St. Paul, "worketh patience, and patience probation, and probation hope." Tribulation, the succession of sorrows, coming, as the word means, like the blows of a flail, is the very thing that destroys the native buoyancy of youth, and our first instinctive attitude towards it is impatience. But if we have already faith enough to believe that it is God's will, and therefore accept it as such, it endows us with patience, and in that patience moulds our character and refines our insight; till we can see that its inner meaning is far other than at first appeared, and say with the Psalmist, "It is good for me that I have been in trouble, that I might learn thy statutes." And when we can rise to this assurance, the very recurrence of our troubles helps us, for it enables us to collect the law of them from their separate instances, and find that it is always the same; that trials accepted as God's will for us are always instruments of blessing, and lead us on to spiritual levels that we could not otherwise attain. And if once we are sure of this, tribulation is robbed of its real anguish. For we have learned to look

through its external appearance, and see that, instead of destroying hope, it is in reality hope's truest friend. And so we can face the future, secure that, in a rationally ordered universe, it must resemble the past; and that the sorrows which seem terrible, as we advance to meet them, must, like those that we have already left behind us, prove blessings in disguise. And so the long years of patience try us, test us, prove us, and out of that probation give us hope.

Thus, as distinct from the natural hopefulness of youth or disposition, which, good though it is, can give no rational explanation of itself, Christian hope has a reason for its existence, being based on the solid ground of a spiritual induction: "I have been young, and now am old: yet saw I never the righteous forsaken." While it further illustrates the way in which all other Christian graces spring from faith, as the whole process of its development depends upon our ability to take a faithful view of the world—"to endure as seeing him who is invisible."

Such, then, is the mode in which hope grows; and when we turn to the way in which it acts, we see that it is hardly less important than faith itself, since it implies that confidence in the future to which all progress is due. We may notice this

first in our personal life, with its varieties of spiritual experience. There is the conflict with sin, in which we often seem to gain no ground; the same temptations recurring year after year with wearisome identity, or disappearing, when resisted, only to reappear in a new form; while our efforts after virtue seem daily to be renewed only that in like manner they may be daily disappointed. And in this long struggle with discouragement hope is the sole secret of our success, for it is the one thing that enables us to rise after every fall, to take new heart after every failure, resolute to die fighting, rather than accept defeat.

> Say not the struggle nought availeth,
> The labour and the wounds are vain,
> The enemy faints not nor faileth,
> And as things have been they remain.
> . . . . .
> For while the tired waves vainly breaking,
> Seem here no painful inch to gain,
> Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
> Comes silent, flooding in, the main.[1]

And then there is the trial of growing old, with all its premonitory symptoms. The decrease of capacity, the increase of infirmity, the prospect of the end, oppress the ageing man with gloom, and tempt him cynically to sadden others with the

[1] A. H. Clough.

shadow of his own distress. But if we contrast Matthew Arnold's melancholy picture of old age with the stirring trumpet-tones of Browning's "Rabbi ben Ezra," we see, in sharp contrast, how Christian hope has changed all this:

> Grow old along with me!
> The best is yet to be,
> The last of life, for which the first was made:
> Our times are in His hand
> Who saith, "A whole I planned,
> Youth shows but half; trust God: see all, nor be afraid!"

In fact, the spiritual induction that we traced above must gather fuller force with each succeeding year, and thus the foundation on which hope rests is at its strongest in old age, enabling the Christian to say with St. Paul, as he views time pass away, "Now is our salvation nearer than when we believed."

And these words point us to the climax of our Christian hope: "The righteous hath hope in his death." We have already vindicated the Christian life against the common charge of what has been called other-worldliness, by emphasising the fact that our eternal life begins here and now, and cannot therefore but express itself in all our relations to this present world. But this does not mean that we should be content to do our

duty here, without a thought of what may come hereafter. On the contrary, the Christian life is what it is, because of what it hopes to be. It is guided and sustained throughout by "the faith that looks through death." "Death," said Aristotle, "is of all things the most terrible, for it is an end" (*πέρας*). And it is precisely because to the Christian it is not an end that his conduct is so different from that of the Greek—a contrast well drawn out by Browning in his "Old Pictures at Florence." For the Greek, and all who think with him, must seek his full development in this world; whereas, in the Christian view, "man has forever," he can afford to wait, and his whole life is conditioned by this fact. Hence his hope culminates in death, as being but the entrance to the life immortal; he dies looking forward and not backward, and therefore progressive to the very end; for hope is the mainspring of progress, and "the righteous hath hope in his death."

But, besides our individual life, we have our social and corporate life as Christians, and there too hope has an important part to play. For tribulation befalls the society as well as its separate members, and then the men of hope become the saviours of their fellows. We may

see this writ large in the history of Israel. That history is a long expectation, which again and again dies down under domestic apostasy and foreign oppression. But prophet after prophet arises in the darkness, to keep the national hope alive. They denounce sin, and proclaim judgment, and exhort to repentance; but always with an accompaniment of hope, which only grows clearer as disasters thicken, a confident reassertion that God's promise in the end would be fulfilled; till, when the fulfilment came, those who had eyes to see and ears to hear were ready to recognise that "to him gave all the prophets witness." And we who can survey the completed history see that the men of hope were fully justified. They were ridiculed, opposed, imprisoned, slaughtered in their day, but the truth was on their side, and in the end prevailed.

And the same has been the case with the Christian Church. It was threatened with annihilation in the days of persecution. The central truth of its being was imperilled by Arianism. It was swept out of whole provinces by Mohammedan conquest. Its moral standard was lowered in the dark ages of barbarism, priesthood and people growing alike corrupt.

It has been subject to a long succession of intellectual attacks from Celsus to Voltaire. While its visible unity has been perpetually endangered, and finally destroyed, by sectarian strife. It has never ceased to be in tribulation. Yet *Athanasius contra mundum* has become a proverb that is true of every age. There have always been faithful men who, when their fellows were losing heart around them, have kept in mind the promise "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world," and "the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"; and, secure in their confidence, have inspired others with their own high hope. And so, after nineteen centuries of obloquy and opposition, the same ventures of hope are being made, with the same assurance as of old, in the many mission fields of the modern world.

Thus in the collective as well as in the individual life of Christians the process is the same; and the spiritual induction, on which we have seen our personal hope to rest, is further fortified by the history of the Church.

Finally, there is yet another aspect of hope which is of great value in Christian character, and that is its power as a philanthropic agent.

We have alluded to missions; but it must be remembered that their spirit is not confined to the particular efforts that commonly go by that name. For every Christian, who takes his religion seriously, partakes of the missionary character of the whole society. He recognises an obligation upon him to work for others, either with head or heart or hand, in order to spread Christian knowledge or Christian practice or Christian peace. And the common difficulty of all such work is the temptation to discouragement. The ignorant prefer their ignorance; the sinners continue in their sin; penitents relapse; mourners refuse to be comforted; apathy and indifference paralyse endeavour; while the dead weight of all the inveterate evil in the world raises barriers against improvement on every side. And to persevere in the face of all these things is only possible through the power of hope. Nor is mere perseverance all that such hope effects; for it is contagious; it inspires others; it kindles life in the hopeless; it actually accomplishes, by sheer persistence, the work that nothing else could do. The men of hope carry forward their fellows, as Matthew Arnold has well described them, in words that gain

impressiveness from their contrast to his own prevailing sadness :

> Beacons of hope, ye appear !
> Languor is not in your heart,
> Weakness is not in your word,
> Weariness not on your brow.
> Ye alight in our van ! at your voice,
> Panic, despair, flee away.
> Ye move through the ranks, recall
> The stragglers, refresh the outworn,
> Praise, re-inspire the brave !
> Order, courage, return.
> Eyes rekindling, and prayers,
> Follow your steps as ye go.
> Ye fill up the gaps in our files,
> Strengthen the wavering line,
> Stablish, continue our march,
> On, to the bound of the waste,
> On, to the City of God.[1]

[1] Rugby Chapel.

# CHAPTER V

## LOVE

Love is the third theological virtue, or virtue that has God for its immediate object. For though the love of God and the love of our neighbour are intimately one, the former is, in Christian ethics, the foundation, and the only sure foundation, of the latter; and comes first in the order of thought, though not necessarily in the order of time; since many men can only be educated through the human affection for the divine; through the love of the brother whom they have seen for the love of God whom they have not seen.

Now the life, the more abundant life, that Christianity comes to bring us is simply the life of love—love enfranchised and enlightened and enlarged. Faith and hope are needed for its maintenance in this imperfect world, and various other virtues follow in its train, but the essence

of the life, the life itself, is love. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love." It is important, therefore, to understand what we mean by love, since many misconceptions have gathered round the word. And in the first place we mean one thing and one only; there are not two kinds of love, an earthly and a spiritual; but all true love is identical in kind, whether it be the love of parent and child, the love of husband and wife, the love of friends or the love of God. The opposite opinion has arisen from the fact that the word is, as even Shelley could say of it, "too often profaned" by being applied to what is not simply love, but love corrupted by sin, and often so deeply corrupted as to lose all likeness to its original. Yet, if we analyse this degradation in any given case, we can see at once that it is not the element of love, but the element of sin, that is at fault: the sin has killed out the love.

This being the case, then, that there is only one kind of love, we may learn something of its nature by looking first at its simplest human manifestation. It is an emotional attraction to another person, from whom we desire a like

response. Of course we do not always meet with this response, and much of the noblest human love is unrequited. But as far as it is so, it is incomplete and frustrated. For the desire to be loved in return is of the very essence of love, which is only complete when it is mutual. And it is important to remember this fact on account of its theological consequences. For a disinterested love of God has sometimes been advocated by Christians; as, for instance, by Fénelon, in his well-known controversy with Bossuet, in defence of Madame Guyon. But such disinterested love is not really Christian. It belongs to Pantheistic systems, which, like those of the Indian mystics or Spinoza, do not conceive of God as personal, and therefore capable of returning the affection of a person. Whereas Christianity is emphatically the religion of personality, and views love as the highest expression of personality, the energy in which all its other functions meet. But true human love, though it inevitably desires response, is not therefore selfish. On the contrary, its natural, its necessary manifestation is self-sacrifice. "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend." We can give no reason

for this, but it requires no reason, for it is a fact of experience, and as such a part of the very notion of love. At the same time, where love is mutual, self-sacrifice must be mutual also, and thus result not in the impoverishment but in the enrichment of either personality, by the gain of the other's gift.

Such is human love, in its noblest form, as a fact of experience. And it is by the light of this experience that we interpret divine love. If God is Love, in the only sense of the word that is intelligible to us, He must desire to give Himself to us, and desire our love in return; and that return will consist in our giving ourselves to Him. And this is the Christian belief: that God is Love, and therefore the source and sustainer of all true human love, which, though it may be first elicited by "our brother whom we have seen," can only find its ultimate and adequate end in God; but in God conceived not as excluding, but as including and constituting, all that is lovely in our finite objects of love. And as human love sweeps all the other functions of our personality into its service, so our love of God must carry with it the obedience of our whole being. It must be the one motive which colours not only all

our affections, but the entire course of our reason and our will, rendering all our various activities only modes of its manifestation. To attain this goal is the constant aim of the Christian life.

But here we are met by the question, Why do you believe that God is Love? If it were true, it would indeed solve all our problems; but is it true, can it be true in face of all the evidence that appears against it? It would be beside our present purpose to answer this objection at length, because we are here concerned with Christian practice, the conduct of those who already have the belief in question. But it may be worth while briefly to indicate the line of our answer, with a view to showing that in this, the cardinal principle of his life, the Christian is no mere credulous creature of his own emotions, but has his philosophy of the universe behind him.

Our first reason, then, for believing that God is Love, is the authority of Jesus Christ—His declaration and manifestation of the fact as God incarnate. That is to say, all the cumulative and complex proofs of Christianity are proofs to us of this fact, which simply is the kernel of Christianity. If Christianity is true, God is Love. Secondly, this belief is corroborated by the analysis of love

itself, as we find it in experience. For it is the fundamental characteristic of our personality, the first to appear in infancy, the last to survive in age; our strongest motive, our deepest need, the one desire whose satisfaction is the only condition of our ultimate rest. Personality has, in fact, been described as the capacity for fellowship, and therefore, of course, for the highest degree of fellowship, which is love. And in proportion as this capacity is realised, human character is ennobled. The most perfect type of personality, which we know by experience, is that in which the rational and moral development is dominated by the presence of love. Love is thus at once the basis and the crown of personality. Consequently all the arguments for the personality of God, which arise from the existence of human personality, are arguments also for the love of God. If God is personal He must be loving, for that is what, on analysis, we find personality to mean.

Further, the most philosophical students of love from Plato and Plotinus to Augustine and Dante have felt that it demands, in the last resort, an infinite object and an infinite response; that our love of finite persons, in proportion as it is purged of selfishness, points through them and

beyond them to an eternal source of love, in communion with which alone it can find ultimate rest: "We are restless till we rest in Thee." And we may argue that in a world which is rationally, and therefore teleologically, ordered, the existence of so profound and universal an instinct proves the possibility of its own satisfaction; a mode of argument that Aristotle approved. While some minds would go further and say that love's own mystic intuition affirms the reality of its eternal object, independently of other proof.

Moreover, these considerations are further supported by all the provision that we can trace in the world for the happiness of animals and man, including the beauty of nature viewed in connection with the emotion that it excites. These are all positive arguments of great weight, which point to the conclusion that God is love, and so corroborate, or predispose us toward the revelation of Christ.

On the other hand stands the sombre fact of the existence of evil, which is commonly assumed to include both pain and sin. This more than counterbalances, in many minds, all the arguments of opposite import, and is the foundation of the various pessimistic systems. Confessedly no speculative solution of this difficulty

is at present possible to us; but for this very reason the Christian declines to draw, or to allow conclusions to be drawn from it, which the state of our knowledge does not justify. To begin with human nature, which is what we know best, pain and sin are distinct things; and in a world where sin exists, pain has so many uses, that it cannot be called, in any true sense of the word, evil. It is preventive, counteractive, purgative, punitive of sin; and as such we ourselves inflict it from what we know to be motives of love. Any inference, therefore, that can be drawn from its existence, in a sinful world, is rather in favour of than against the love of God. This still leaves animal pain a problem, and to many minds a more staggering problem, both from its long extent through geological ages, and its apparent inability to serve moral purposes like human pain. We are bound, therefore, to remember that our knowledge is in this case mainly hypothetical. We only know the animal world from the outside, and have consequently no means of estimating the amount of animal suffering, while there are many considerations which point to its being less than our imagination pictures. And further, we know nothing of what passes within the animal con-

sciousness, and of the possible uses which pain may there subserve. The existence of the animals, their destiny, the final cause of their creation is a mystery that we cannot solve. And this being the case, we are not in a position to found any serious argument upon

> Nature, red in tooth and claw
> With ravine.

To do so is to confound imagination with reason, hypothesis with fact. Pain, in the only region where we can test it, is not incompatible with love. We have no justification therefore for supposing that, where we cannot test it, the case is the reverse; as we have already pointed out.

With sin it is otherwise, for we know from experience that sin is the very antithesis of love. But here too we have to remember the limitations of our reason, and to distinguish between knowledge and conjecture. We know neither the beginning nor the end of moral evil, and cannot therefore pretend to comprehend it. We only know its practical manifestation in ourselves and other human beings; and there we see that while, on the one hand, sin is always opposed to goodness and love, goodness and love, on the other hand, are ever working to overcome it. In

other words, it is a rebellion against all the forces that we recognise as divine in the world, while these forces never cease to counterwork it. And however much we may be constrained to say that God permits it, in permitting sinners to exist, it is we ourselves who commit it, and feel as we do so that we are disobeying God. But we cannot urge as an argument against the love of God an occurrence for which we ourselves are at any rate largely responsible, and which we firmly believe that God disapproves. We can, indeed, use it as an argument against His wisdom or His power, but to do so implies a knowledge of the beginning and the end of evil, which is precisely what we do not possess. And there is no arguing from premises that we cannot comprehend.

Briefly, therefore, the Christian position is that our knowledge of the mystery of pain and sin is too imperfect, and hypothetical in character, to counterbalance the positive proofs of divine love in the world. And this is quite a distinct contention, it may be remarked in passing, from the fatally false doctrine, that human and divine love are so different in kind as to preclude our arguing from the attributes of the one to those of the other—conduct which is incompatible with human

love being possibly compatible with divine. Such an attempt to defend Christianity on the ground of agnosticism is apt to recoil upon itself, for the agnostic premises once granted, prove a great deal too much, as appeared in the use made of Mansel's argument by Herbert Spencer. On the contrary, we maintain that love must everywhere and always be the same, and for that reason we may argue from the human to the divine. But when a human being, of whose love we are perfectly sure, acts on occasion in a way to perplex us, we are ready, as a rule, to take his action upon trust and await its explanation. Much more, therefore, if once we have a conviction that God loves us, grounded on facts that we can understand, we may trust His love to underlie any adverse appearances which, from the nature of the case, we know that we cannot understand; and that is what the Christian does. His position is often misrepresented, as a complacent optimism closing the eyes to inconvenient facts, and as such is not infrequently exposed to shallow ridicule in popular literature. But this is the very reverse of the truth. Faith, of course, is a very important element in the position, but the function of faith is not to close but to open the eyes wider to—

All that the world's coarse thumb
And finger fails to plumb ;

to look behind appearances, to separate fancy from fact, to draw distinctions which a superficial glance crudely ignores, to estimate arguments by their sense and not their sound. In a word, faith quickens the exercise of the intellect, by counteracting the effect upon it of sin. For sin, in the Christian view, disorders the intellect as much as the body or the will. Men are commonly blinded to this fact by the many successful achievements of the intellect. But these lie in regions which, like science and mathematics, are relatively unaffected by sin. When, however, we employ our intellect on such questions as the Being and Nature of God, and His relation to man, we are moving in a region which sin profoundly affects. We are dealing with those spiritual realities which it is the especial tendency of sin to obscure ; we are sinners criticising the Being against whom we have sinned, and whose relation to us must of necessity be modified by the fact. Unless, therefore, we make the most careful allowance for the distorting effect of sin upon our spiritual vision, we are sure to go wrong. And this is what men commonly omit to do. They assume that their

intellect will act as impartially upon spiritual problems as upon mathematics, and this is not, and never can be the case. A sinner criticising God is like a patient criticising his physician at a time when his mind is clouded by disease.

The object of this digression has been merely to show that the Christian attitude is not lightly assumed, in face of the objections that can be urged against it, but rests upon grave grounds of reason. To return now to the practical point, the Christian life consists in the love of God and our neighbour. And though, as we have said above, men may be led from the latter to the former, it is not till they have reached the former that they are distinctively Christian. For the love of God is not only the essential foundation of the Christian life, but also the necessary condition of all other true love. This is so, in the first place, because all true love is, as we have seen, ultimately of the infinite and the eternal, however dimly conscious we may be of the fact. And secondly—though this is only a concrete way of stating the same thing—because our love for our human friends is bound to become selfish and degenerate, unless it is combined with the love of God. The very intensity of our feeling is fatal to its real satisfaction

except upon this condition, as is recognised in the famous line of Lovelace—

> I could not love thee, dear, so much,
> Lov'd I not honour more.

If our love is to live and expand, it must be approved by conscience, qualified by goodness, obedient to the moral law; all which phrases merely mean that it must implicitly be combined with the love of God. Thirdly, the love of our neighbour in its wider sense, not, that is, of the few to whom we are naturally attracted, but of the many for whom we feel no attraction at all, is very rarely possible apart from the love of God. True, there is that elemental kind of enthusiasm for humanity which Walt Whitman describes, the impulse that we feel in presence of a crowd; but this is too rudimentary and chaotic an emotion to be really effective, without a discipline which it does not of itself supply. True also, there is that service of humanity which Comte thought to be possible without a God. But this is on the one hand a creation of Christianity, though disowning its parentage, and involves a love of goodness which is, in fact, nothing less than an implicit love of God; while, on the other hand, it is too sublimated a conception ever to appeal to

the mass of mankind. As a matter of fact, the ordinary man does not love those who are distasteful to him; much less his enemies, the unthankful and the evil, which is what Christianity enjoins. And Christianity has made this possible, in a far greater degree than any other religion, by helping us to realise that all men are the objects of God's love equally with ourselves, and must therefore be included in our love for God; not merely because He commands it, but because, if our love for Him is real, it must by its very nature comprise all objects of His love. Thus the love of God is the presupposition of the true love of our neighbour, whether he be natural friend or foe.

This, then, raises the common Christian problem, How are we to attain to the love of God? Fundamentally it must come from above, like "every good and perfect gift." "We love him, because he first loved us." But such gifts do not override our free-will; they must be appropriated by our own desire; and how is this to be? Here, again, human analogy may help us. Very different characteristics, graces, perfections, kinds of loveliness elicit our natural love. But whatever they are, we think about them; we exercise our reason and imagination over them; we meditate upon

them ; and love grows. So with God : His modes of appeal to us are infinitely various, but we must bring our mind to bear on them, till "while we are musing the fire kindles." Meditation, therefore, or the exercise of our mind upon God's manifestations of Himself, is essential to our attainment of love. And these manifestations are very various. There is the beauty and the wonder of the world, and the human love that surrounds us, and the natural joy of living, considered as God's creation. Then there is the appeal of the Incarnation and the Atonement to our soul. And then there are the hidden mercies, the secret warnings, the answered prayers, the uplifting inspirations of our own inner history. All these things may in time converge and coalesce in a united effect upon the soul ; but one or other of them is likely at first to appeal to us more than the rest, and upon that it will be our wisdom to dwell in meditation. In saying this, one does not, of course, mean that anything else can take the place of the Incarnation and Atonement as the central revelation of God's love for us, when once it is adequately realised, but merely that such realisation need not, and often does not, come first in our personal history. On the contrary, the order of thanksgiving in the

Prayer Book, which puts "our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life" before "the redemption of the world," is probably the usual order in which God's love comes to be realised. There is therefore fatal falsehood in the idea that we should turn our back upon the world in order to love God, and think to glorify our Creator by ignoring His creation. It is quite true that such a method has been approved and advocated by many great mystics and ascetics, who have attained their desired end in this way. And indeed for some men it may be a practical necessity, like the plucking out of the right eye. But none the less it is an imperfect method, confusing the world as God made it with the world as man has marred it, and must never, therefore, be exalted into a universal rule. For the beauty of the world, and the love of friends, and the joy of existence are, after all, the things that teach us what the possibilities of life are. They foreshadow the positive content of the life to which redemption leads us. And when the most spiritual of all painters would picture heaven, it is with sunlight and flowers, and friends embracing, and the joyous movement of a dance. And it is not therefore by turning away from the bright side of life, but by learning

in meditation to see God through it, that men can best be bid to recognise His love in "the redemption of the world, the means of grace, and the hope of glory." Of course, there is always the temptation in a sinful world to love the creature more than the Creator; yet the true remedy for this is not in Loyola's phrase "to become indifferent to all created things," however allowable that may be as an ascetic method, for those who see for themselves no other way; but rather so to love the creature that it may lead us on to the Creator, till we love God in our neighbour and our neighbour in God.

Finally, we must remember that the love of which we are speaking has many degrees and is of gradual growth. Men may earnestly desire to love God, and yet feel themselves very far removed from the possibility of such emotion as possessed St. Paul and St. John, St. Ignatius of Antioch, St. Bernard, St. Francis, and the countless other saints and martyrs of kindred character that might be named. But even in the most saintly lives such experience may be modified by temperament and circumstance, and is very far indeed from being universal, as many autobiographies attest. Meanwhile, what is always in our power is the

love of the will. The practice of love, that is to say, which in this case is the important thing, may flourish quite apart from its emotion. "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them," says Jesus Christ, "he it is that loveth me . . . and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him." We can keep the commandments of Christ by doing those things to our neighbour which He tells us are implicitly done to Himself; till we insensibly grow capable of that more personal affection, which, as being, after all, His gift, can only be expected to occur at the times and in the measure that He wills.

These considerations may further justify what we said above upon the implicit love of God. The existence of men who lead noble lives, devoted to the service of their fellows, without any conscious reference to God, presents a problem by which many minds are seriously perplexed; while the explanation that these men are the creation of Christian antecedents and a Christian atmosphere, though true as far as it goes, does not cover the whole ground, and often fails, therefore, to carry with it conviction. One may then go further than this and maintain, without being guilty of any undue subtlety, that

such men have in reality an implicit love of God, which is the true source of their service of man. For they love goodness, and to love goodness is in fact to love God, while it is only the strength of their love of goodness that enables them to act as they do. Their existence, therefore, so far from being a disquieting objection to the Christian belief, is only one of those exceptions which ultimately prove the rule; in the sense that on analysis it turns out to be an instance of the rule—the rule that the love of our neighbour must be founded on the love of God. For these men possess, without knowing it, what really is, if one may use the expression, the most important element in the love of God, and solely in virtue of that possession can live for the service of mankind. And we must remember that the words "Ye have done it unto me" are represented as addressed to men who had never learned to recognise Christ in their neighbour, yet had done their social duty none the less. While, therefore, the unbelief of men who lead good lives must always cause regret to the Christian, the goodness of their lives need not perplex him, as being implicitly due to the same cause which has for himself become explicit.

# CHAPTER VI

## THE CARDINAL VIRTUES

We have seen above that the love of God, which is the true motive of Christian conduct, admits of many different degrees, ranging, in fact, from that fear of God which the Old Testament describes as the "beginning of wisdom," to the perfect love of which St. John speaks as "casting out fear." But it always implies free obedience to a Person, whose commandment the moral law is. Greek philosophy, in its pre-Christian form, had tended to view the moral law as impersonal, and to regard its religious presentation as a concession to popular opinion. And there is a tendency in many quarters at the present day to relapse to this antiquated point of view, as if it were truly the more philosophic. Whereas it really arose only out of the polemic of the earlier philosophy with popular polytheism, while the later Greek philosophers, who had come in

contact with Christian thought, took a much more religious view of ethics. For in the Christian belief personality is the highest conception that we can form of God; and when we use impersonal expressions like "the laws of nature," or "the laws of morality," or "the laws of grace," we are only describing, in an abstract way, the various attributes or aspects of what is ultimately God's free-will. The fundamental postulate, therefore, of Christian ethics is religion. Our life consists in personal relationship to a personal God, and its whole character must be determined by that fact; it must be rooted and grounded in the love of God. Hence Augustine describes virtue as the unfolding or development of love—*Virtus est ordo amoris*—and he illustrates this from the case of the four cardinal virtues, as they were afterwards called—temperance, courage, justice, and prudence. Plato first summed up the kinds of conduct under these four heads; and from him they passed into Greek philosophy, and thence into the Christian scheme of ethics. But for the Greek these virtues tended to be merely personal or self-regarding—modes, in fact, of self-respect; even justice being said in the *Republic* to consist in each man doing his own work. And

Augustine shows how Christianity lifted them at once into a higher atmosphere, by directing them to God as their object and end. "I would not hesitate," he says, "to define those four virtues, which make such an impression upon our minds, that they are in every man's mouth: temperance as love surrendering itself wholly to Him who is its object; courage as love bearing all things gladly for the sake of Him who is its object; justice as love serving only Him who is its object, and therefore rightly ruling (*recet regnans*);[1] prudence as love making wise distinction between what hinders and what helps itself." The Christian, that is to say, is temperate and courageous, just and prudent, not merely because reason prescribes such conduct as right, nor because it will conduce to his personal happiness, or to the greatest happiness of the greatest number of men, but because he lives with conscious reference to God. His object in life is union with God, and this must involve obedience to "God's holy will and commandments"—commandments, that is to say, which do not arbitrarily constitute morality by the mere fact of commanding it, as some thinkers

[1] *De Moribus*, i. 25.

have mistakenly maintained, but which are the necessary expression of a holy will, or of a character whose essential attribute is holiness.

Of course, when we speak of divine holiness, as of any other divine attribute, we are using language that we only partly comprehend. For we cannot say wherein the essential holiness of God consists. But this does not create any practical difficulty, for all that we need to know of it is expressed for us in the life of Christ. Christ exhibits the divine holiness in human terms, and, in studying the life of Christ, we learn what those human characteristics are which reflect on earth the transcendent holiness of God.

The various Christian graces, then, with the cardinal virtues at their head, are modes of holiness, springing from the desire for union with God who is all-holy. They are quick with the life of a personal relationship. We may indeed describe them, as we often do, in the common language of all ethics; we may speak of practising virtue and doing good, phrases which come to us originally from Greek philosophy; or we may speak of doing right, or doing our duty, or fulfilling our obligations, terms that we have inherited from Roman law;

but all these expressions mean, for the Christian, doing God's will, out of one degree or another of love for God. Secular moralists often speak as if it were a nobler, because a harder, thing to do our duty without thought of God, and without hope of reward; and this might be true if morality were the ultimate end of man. But it is not so. Life, as we have seen, development, expansion, realisation is that which all his instincts demand. Morality is a necessary means to such life, and also a necessary mode of its expression, but it is not the life itself. The life itself consists in union with God.

Even if we concede, therefore, that the man who lives nobly, without thought of God, does a harder thing, we should deny that he did so human or complete a thing as the man who lives with God for his object. Moreover, our concession would still require qualification. In the first place, high morality without religion is a rare exception, which could never be successfully attained by the majority of men. In the second place, though we may admire the man who does a difficult thing, mere difficulty is no criterion of conduct. We do not ask "Is it hard?" but "Is it right?" And if the additional difficulty of a course of conduct is

due to what we believe to be an erroneous belief, it can scarcely command admiration. But, thirdly, we must ask whether, after all, it is really harder to be merely moral than to be spiritual also. Wordsworth, at any rate, may be quoted to the opposite effect :—

> 'Tis by comparison an easy task
> Earth to despise ; but to converse with heaven
> That is not easy.

The contrary notion arises from the mistaken idea that the effect of religion upon conduct is due to its promise of reward or punishment hereafter. But though this was a common thought among the utilitarian moralists of the eighteenth century, it is very far indeed from being the whole doctrine, or even the most important element in the doctrine of the Christian Church upon the subject. For that doctrine is, as we have seen, that holiness, spirituality of life, union with God is the true cause and condition of good conduct ; and to raise our sinful nature to this high level is far from being an easy thing.

Christian conduct, then, is distinguished by having God for its object and the love of God for its motive. "Whether we live, we live unto the Lord ; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord."

"He that eateth, eateth unto the Lord . . . and he that eateth not, unto the Lord he eateth not." Servants are bidden to serve as "unto the Lord, and not unto men," and masters to rule as "having a Master in heaven." And in proportion as we rise to this ideal, every virtue, every duty, every action becomes a personal relation, a mode of intercourse, an expression of love. And various characteristics of the Christian life follow from this fact.

In the first place, life comes to be regarded as a vocation, a call to serve God in a particular way. Heredity, temperament, circumstances, opportunity, advice may all have a part to play in shaping the course of our life, but in and through and behind all these impersonal things, accidents and chances as they are often named, we recognise, as Christians, the call of God. St. Paul is full of this thought of our vocation and calling; throughout his Epistles it constantly recurs. "As God hath called each, so let him walk." "Let each man abide in that calling wherein he was called." It is not limited to special vocations, but coextensive with the varieties of life, including even slavery among its forms. "Wast thou called being a bondservant, care not

for it." And this conception gives a dignity and stability to the whole course of life. It is not, of course, without its dangers, for it may be interpreted so rigidly as to imperil freedom, or so presumptuously as to intensify fanaticism. But, as a rule, the sense of vocation gives a more definite aim to life, and enables that patient perseverance which is the secret of all fruitful work, while it especially dignifies and consecrates the conditions of lowliness and pain.

Again, the sense of personal relationship, of living to the Lord, to whom "all things are naked and open," tends to increase our interior truthfulness of character. Self-deceit is an insidious enemy, with which we all have to contend; and in this contention we are seriously assisted by such reflections as those of the Psalmist: "Thou understandest my thoughts long before. Thou art about my path, and about my bed: and spiest out all my ways. For lo, there is not a word in my tongue: but thou, O Lord, knowest it altogether. . . . Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart: prove me and examine my thoughts." Such considerations help us to sincerity of motive, to purity of intention, to that "bringing into captivity of every thought" which St. Paul

enjoins. It leads us to that truthfulness with ourselves which is the foundation of all reality in character, as well as the condition of our attaining any other kind of truth. Hence the Christian life is often described in terms of truth; primarily, indeed, as being founded on Him who is objectively "the Truth," but also as being fashioned by that very fact into subjective truthfulness.

Again, akin to this truthfulness of thought, and springing from the same source, is thoroughness in work. Servants are bidden to obey "not with eyeservice, as menpleasers," but "as unto the Lord." And thoroughness involves attention to small details of conduct. For if magnanimity were, as Hobbes defined it, "a contempt of little helps and hindrances," it would have no place in Christian ethics, which always emphasise the importance of what we call small things. Indeed, where love is concerned small things become all-important. For real love is too infinite ever to be adequately expressed in its greatness; and so we reverse the attempt and symbolise it by infinitesimal actions and attentions—things that prove love because they are too slight for anything but love to think worth doing, as for anything but love to see when done.

Hence, in proportion as the love of God becomes our motive, we estimate small points of conduct at their real value, which is great; and that because it is the small details of daily life that form our habits, while accumulated habits make our character. Attention, therefore, to the "day of small things" is one of the notes of Christian thoroughness, and gives that solidity to character which enables it to withstand the shock of the greater crises of life—crises which in their turn may carry us far forward, but whose effect upon us is determined by what, in the long patient days of small things, we have become.

We have taken the four cardinal virtues as illustrations of the way in which the Christian motive acts, and the case is the same with all the other virtues that we could name, whether adopted from the older ethics or subsequently added by Christian moralists. Their distinctive feature (or, in logical language, their *differentia*) is to be done "as unto the Lord," and from the highest degree of love to which their doer has as yet attained. And this unity of motive and identity of object in all actions simplifies Christian ethics by superseding the necessity for many of the questions which secular moralists have to

raise. "What," for instance, "is the moral standard or ideal?" "What is the criterion of morality?" "What is the nature of the sanction by which it is enforced?" "What constitutes the obligation to be moral?" These and similar problems have given rise to infinite discussion among different schools of ethics; but, however much they may retain an interest for speculative minds, they are practically solved, so soon as we are once convinced that our true life consists in union with an all-holy Person. We still need to consider the details of conduct as they arise, but need no longer discuss its speculative basis.

But a still more important simplification which Christianity effects is that it naturally removes all conflict between personal and social virtue; between what the older moralists called self-love and benevolence, or egoism and altruism as it is the present custom to call them. The difficulty of reconciling these two principles is a problem that has exercised many moralists, especially Hobbes and the utilitarians, who have been driven to very strained and artificial solutions of it. And of course, as long as we assume a radical antagonism between the two, it is really insoluble. But the speculative difficulty ceases, when once

we recognise the twofold nature of personality; that a person, while on the one hand he is an individual being, self-identical and separate from all others, is on the other hand a social being, who can only realise himself in union with others. There then only remains the practical difficulty created by sin. Sin is the source of selfishness, the desire to gratify self at the expense of others; and the war of each against all (*bellum omnium contra omnes*) is not the natural state of man, as Hobbes supposed, but only the natural state of sinful man. But by overcoming sin in the individual, Christianity liberates his whole personality, and thus enables his truly social nature to assert itself; while it further points to God as the true end and object of that social nature, the only Being in whom our desire for communion with others can be adequately satisfied. And in proportion as we realise this, and rise to the love of God, we necessarily include in our affection, first, those other beings who are in the like communion of love with Him; and secondly, all humanity as the object of His love.

Thus the ideal which the Christian sees before him is the communion of every person with all other persons, through their common union with

the infinite personality of God; and therein the adequate and harmonious satisfaction of the social desires of humanity; all loving and living for each, and each living for and loving all. Of course only a very partial and imperfect realisation of this ideal is at present possible, limited as we are by mortality and hampered by our sin. But that fragmentary realisation which we attain in "the love of the brethren," here and now, is sufficient to show us what it might be when completed, in a world where sin is not; and that is "the divine event" to which we believe "the whole creation moves."

Now, as long as the early Church lived face to face with an unchristian and anti-christian society, although its internal "love of the brethren" was intensified by the fact, its attitude towards the external world was necessarily one of detachment; there were large tracts of social life into which it could not enter; not because they were intrinsically unchristian, but because, for the time being, they were under hostile occupation. This condition of things naturally favoured the growth of the monastic ideal, which was further accentuated in the mediæval Church by the barbarism of society. The times were so wild that those who

desired to lead really Christian lives could only do so by taking refuge in the cloister; where they necessarily confined their attention to those personal virtues which could be cultivated in retirement from the world. And though, in the analysis and exposition of these virtues, the mediæval moralists did a work of permanent value for the Church, it was one which emphasised the spirit of detachment from secular affairs; the spirit which we see at its best in the anonymous *German Theology* and in à Kempis' *Imitation of Christ.* It was not, therefore, till the Renaissance that the value and dignity of secular life was reaffirmed. And the Renaissance, as a whole, was not a Christian movement; while even its best work was confused by the admixture of classical with Christian ideals. This contributed, with other causes, to throw the Reformation back upon personal morality, the salvation of the individual soul; with the natural consequence of a multiplication of sects, amid which universal "love of the brethren" disappeared. Then the Revolution reasserted the protest of the Renaissance in its most extremely anti-christian form, and thus emphasised the opposition between secular and sacred things.

Many historic circumstances, therefore, have hindered the Church from fulfilling its social obligation to convert the kingdoms of this world into the kingdoms of God and of His Christ. But Christians are now reawakening, more fully perhaps than for a long time past, to the extent of their responsibility in this direction, as may be seen in many ways. There is a desire manifested on all sides to make "the love of the brethren" a greater reality, by promoting unity among Christians themselves; there is a notable increase of the missionary spirit; there are more lives devoted to the social as well as the spiritual amelioration of the uneducated, the outcast, and the poor. And all these things indicate a quickened consciousness of our social responsibilities. But our present concern is with another point—the increased and increasing sense of our obligation to carry Christian principles into the details of what is commonly called secular life—art, science, literature, business, policy, amusement, all things that are legitimate objects of human occupation. This might at first sight seem an easier task than to live in ascetic renunciation of the world, since it involves the development, rather than the repression of our

natural and normal energies. But, in fact, to influence the world, without growing worldly in the process, is far harder than to leave it austerely alone. There are, and always have been, men who call themselves Christians, and are, in a degree, and often a very real degree, entitled to the name, yet who keep their religious and their secular life in separate compartments. They are artists and Christians, men of business and Christians, soldiers and Christians, politicians and Christians. But this is not the same thing as being a Christian artist, a Christian soldier, a Christian man of business, a Christian politician; one, that is to say, who carries his Christianity into his secular profession, and thus makes the latter the medium of his Christian work; his vocation; the mode in which to realise his love for God and man.

But in proportion as we honestly attempt to do this, we feel the full force of the evil in the world. For we cannot sweep away the past and start afresh like settlers in some new country; we must enter professions and adopt pursuits which have existed long before us, and which men of all sorts and conditions, evil as well as good, have contributed to mould to their present shape. The

customs, the conventions, the traditions, the associations and whole atmosphere of society are tainted with evil. We have to do right not only in the face of, but often in combination with wrong-doers; to be sincere among the insincere; disinterested among the self-interested; seeking the honour that comes from God only, among men whose habitual object is to receive honour one of another, with all the unreality which this involves. Nor are the issues before us always obvious. For the frontiers between good and evil are not easy of delimitation. In our complex modern life the two things are often inextricably involved, and shade off into one another by subtle, imperceptible degrees. Hence no hard-and-fast rules can be laid down that will suit all the occasions that may occur. We have to extemporise courses of action as fresh circumstances arise. And all this involves a constant strain not only upon our moral courage, but upon our tact and judgment, in comparison with which the seclusion of the cloister would at least be peace. Moreover, with the best intentions, we still carry our personal liability to temptation about with us; and temptations which beset us in the pursuit of our profession are apt to be peculiarly insidious;

whether arising from the nature of our occupation itself or from the character of those with whom we share it. A man must be of sensuous temperament, for example, to be an artist; yet it is precisely such a man that is most exposed to subtle and manifold temptations from the study and practice of art. Or again, a just man of business, with the best of intentions, may find his integrity hard to preserve, when in contact with the lax morality which taints so great a part of the commercial world. An upright politician is continually dealing with men whose motives are inferior to his own; and can only utilise their services at the cost of condescending, in a measure, to their weakness. While, at the other end of society, a conscientious workman or mechanic, who is governed by his union, or a conscientious subordinate under a careless employer, finds his course not only hard, but often involved in extreme perplexity, as to what, in a given case, is right or wrong.

Such and similar difficulties make the task of spiritualising secular life a hard one; though it must not on that account be declined. For it is in one sphere or another of the secular life that the majority of mankind have to develop the

social side of their personality, and in so doing promote the common progress of the race. And for Christians to withhold their "salt of the earth" from any department of this life is to leave it at once a prey to putrefaction. Many Christians, for example, would adopt this policy towards the stage, which is equivalent to saying that in their opinion it ought not to exist; a view to which even Plato, with all his artistic temperament, leaned. But, as a matter of fact, the stage has existed in one form or another throughout civilised history, and we can have no doubt that it will continue to exist, and as long as it exists, to exert ethical influence of one kind or another. And it is as capable of elevation as it is of degradation. It may sink to the level of that Roman stage against which the Fathers thundered, or of the English stage in the reign of Charles the Second. But it may also rise to the height of Æschylus and Sophocles, of Shakespeare, or Corneille, or Wagner. And if Christians, as a body, were to turn their backs upon an institution of such twofold possibility, they would diminish its influence for good and intensify its tendency to evil. At the same time, it must be admitted that the difficulties which, as we have seen,

attend all attempts to spiritualise the secular life, are exceptionally great in the case of the stage. For the susceptible artistic temperament, which the profession presupposes, is inevitably exposed, under the conditions of theatrical life, to the very kinds of excitement and strain which are most liable to upset its equilibrium. And many, in consequence, whose gifts and inclinations would otherwise have led them to the stage, may realise that, with their particular temperament and tendencies, for them it is unsafe; though they would only thus be doing what countless others are obliged to do, in reference to other callings in life—plucking out the right eye, cutting off the right hand, because they find it, in their own case, a practical necessity so to do. For we must remember that character, as we saw above, is always more important in the Christian view than work, no amount of results being able to compensate for character degraded in their achievement. Hence, though in many cases a man may be unable to change his profession when once adopted, he is bound to consider, before adopting it, whether the line of life in question may be reasonably expected to impair or improve his own especial type of character,

character being the sole condition of his doing really Christian work.

Briefly to recapitulate, then: the very fact that love is the Christian motive—love of man in God, and God in man—gives a social character to all Christian virtues, even the most private of them being practised "as unto the Lord." And this is the necessary consequence of our enfranchisement from sin; since it is sin and sin alone that hinders the natural development of our personality, which consists in realising itself with increasing fulness in and through the lives of other persons.

# CHAPTER VII

## PRAYER

THE Christian life, as we have seen, consists in union with God. That is the reason of its penitence, the meaning of its asceticism, the object of its faith and hope, the secret source of all its love. And it goes without saying that, in the last resort, such union can only be effected by God Himself. "I will manifest myself unto him"; "We will come and will make our abode with him," are the declarations of Christ. "God partook of human nature that man might partake of the divine" is their echo in the words of the great theologian of the Church, Athanasius. But still a union of two personal beings must require the consent of both; and there must be a response to God's will, an acceptance, and an active acceptance, of His gift on our side. This follows from the freedom of our will, in the sense of our power of choice. God influences

our will in a thousand ways, but He does not compel it, for to do so would be to destroy the personality which He has created. And all theories of divine grace which would reduce our religion to a system of fatalism have been condemned by the common consciousness of the Christian Church. The Old and New Testament alike accumulate every motive that may persuade us, and then appeal to us to make our choice. "Choose life." "Choose you this day whom ye will serve." And this method of divine dealing with us is confirmed by the inner experience of Christians. Fear, warning, discipline, reasoning, encouragement, love—everything is brought in turn to bear upon our spiritual history, with the single exception of force. We have still to make our own election in the end. And this is the rationale of prayer. Prayer is our conscious response, as free beings, to God's invitation, the effort on our part to enter into that intercourse with God which He on His part desires us to have. It is therefore miserably misconceived by its critical opponents, when represented as a mere petition for favours. For it is something infinitely wider and more important than this. It is the affirma-

tion of our social nature, seeking its only adequate end in union with the absolute and permanent source of all society. Hence prayer is as many-sided as life, and as all-embracing as faith, for it is faith in action. And its human analogue is not petition, but intercourse with a friend. Primarily, we desire such intercourse as an end in itself, simply because our friend is our friend, and the fact of converse with him manifests and satisfies our friendship. And then we tell him our thoughts and seek his criticism and approval of them; we discuss our plans with him and ask his advice; we express our affection, our admiration, our gratitude towards him for his friendship; we invite him to share our joys, and seek his sympathy with our sorrows. And last of all and seldomest, we petition him for anything; while at the same time we are assured, in proportion to the strength of our friendship, that our petition will be answered. Nor is such intercourse always verbal; we feel bound to maintain conversation with strangers, but there is a silence between friends that is far more eloquent than language, because it implies that mutual understanding which the right to be silent involves.

It is on this analogy, then, that we must think of prayer: not merely as one among various religious duties, but as the condition of them all; the habitual reference to God in all the circumstances of our life, till that life grows theocentric, as it is intended to be, with God for its primary thought. The Lord's Prayer, with which we are so familiar as often to miss its significance, is a perpetual reminder of this, a perpetual safeguard against all unworthier conceptions of prayer. For it bids us think first of God and His holiness; of the spread of that holiness on earth; of His heavenly will being done. Only then follow personal petitions, and of these three are concerned with the spiritual obstacles which separate us from God: forgiveness of sin, rescue from temptation, deliverance from evil. One only is devoted to our temporal welfare, and that in its simplest form, "Give us bread enough for to-day." While even this, of course, in the light of Christ's teaching, passes up into a spiritual significance, and leads our thoughts on to the meat which is to do God s will, and the bread that came down from heaven. Thus the Lord's Prayer teaches us to pray, in the deepest sense of the word, for it shows us

the true order and importance and proportion of the objects of prayer; and to live it out is to live in union with God.

But it is obvious that the life of prayer, when thus considered, must be a thing of gradual attainment; through all the degrees that separate the child, who learns the Lord's Prayer by rote at his mother's knee, from the saint who, out of great tribulation, has wrought his life into a Lord's Prayer. For, however natural a function prayer may be of our personality, it is hard to practise in our sinful state. We can no more pray at will, without having carefully acquired the capacity, than we can perform on a musical instrument that we have never seen or handled before. We have therefore to learn to pray. The rudimentary instinct, indeed, is present throughout the human race, as we see from the recorded history of every people in every age. But its action is often atrophied, and always spasmodic, irregular, uncertain, until it has been trained; and its training is a laborious work. Hence the need for those forms of prayer, which have so often been maligned, as interfering with the freedom of the Spirit. Those who raise this objection presuppose a matured faculty for

praying. But it is with no such faculty that as children we begin the world. And stated seasons, stated rules, stated forms of words are as necessary, to start us in the art of praying, as are similar things in the case of any earthly art or science that we would acquire. For we learn to read from an alphabet, and to write from a copy, to draw from a model, and to play from a scale. Nor can we ever dispense with such forms — speaking of the individual, and not of public worship, where they have another justification—till they have created in us a habit of prayer: while most men who are in earnest will even then consider their continuance advisable, to sustain the habit when already formed; since our power of independent prayer is peculiarly liable to fluctuate with the accidents of our bodily and mental organisation. But at the same time, the more real our formal prayer becomes, the less can it remain merely formal. It inevitably develops into ejaculatory prayer: prayer darted upward arrow-like, at no stated time and seasons, in no stated form of words, but whenever our impulse moves us, or a joy or sorrow strikes us, or a crisis calls to action, or an interval to thought. And as this kind of

informal prayer becomes increasingly habitual, the prayerful character is slowly formed, the character of which prayer is the real mainspring, the first necessity, without which it could no longer exist, and whose entire tone and temper is constituted by the fact. We need not further pursue the life of prayer into those loftier regions of religious experience which many of the mystics, like St. Theresa, have described; beyond saying that as the habit of prayer grows, the assurance of spiritual reality increases; investing the whole inner life with that serenity and certitude which only experience can give, and which nothing, when once it has been experienced, can ever take away. "Your joy no man taketh from you." But we have said thus much on the education of prayer, because the fact that it requires such laborious education—or, in other words, that it is so very far from coming naturally to man in his present state—has induced many secular moralists, who do not deny its possibility, to ignore it; or at least to relegate it to the background, as a subsidiary thing, which may or may not be superadded to the ethical life, but without which an adequately ethical life may be led. Whereas the Christian position is

unequivocal: that prayer is the essence of life, while its difficulty is wholly due to sin, and must be met therefore by as earnest effort as we need to fight any besetting temptation, as constant application as we use to gain facility in any earthly art or craft. Doubtless ethical lives may now and again be led without it; but such are, comparatively speaking, few and far between; for the majority of men can never retain their morality without religion. But the Christian life never professes to be merely ethical, but primarily and essentially spiritual, and ethical as the natural result; and the main sustenance of spirituality is answered prayer.

To turn now from the education to the objects or content of prayer, the things with which it is concerned: we have seen that the Lord's Prayer puts first the thought of God and His glory. This accords with the prominent place given to praise and thanksgiving in the Epistles, and echoed in the words of the liturgy, "We praise Thee . . . we give thanks to Thee for Thy great glory, O Lord God." Different things arouse the admiration and gratitude of different minds, but whatever does so arouse us should be immediately utilised to lift us in prayer to God. It is a

familiar experience, for instance, to feel stifled by emotion at the sight of all the beauty and the wonder of the world: sunrise and sunset, moonlight on the water, stars in their courses, shadows on the hills; forests, fields, flowers, animals at play, the dance of insects and the song of birds. We all know the sense of oppression for want of utterance that overcomes us in the presence of these sights and sounds. But in the Christian view the natural outlet for all such pent-up feeling is praise; not in the sense of a vague cosmic emotion, an unpractical sentiment that evaporates in air, but personal praise of God, as exemplified in the Psalms or the Song of the Three Children: "O all ye works of the Lord, bless ye the Lord, praise Him and magnify Him for ever." Such praise is, in the first place, an end in itself, a recognition of fact, a reference of our joy to its true cause, an offering of gratitude to God for the beauty of His creation. But, further, the habit of offering it reacts profoundly upon our own character. For it accustoms us to look at once through material things to their spiritual meaning, and so renders the whole visible universe a means of intercourse with God, a result which Christ must have deliberately intended His

parabolic teaching to effect. While for want of this prayerful attitude all the beauty of nature remains unused, a soundless organ, a sealed book ; if it is not actually, as is often the case, perverted into a palliation of materialism. This is only one illustration of how praise may arise. A similar effect may be produced by human love. For truly to love any one, parent or child, lover or friend, is to feel how much more there is in love than can ever be expressed. Nor only so ; but all true love awakens us to the existence of an infinite world of love around us, full of tender pathos and unselfish sacrifice, of which we all have reaped the blessing, without adequate response. We only realise by slow degrees what all this human love has done for us, and how much of it has gone unheeded, till past the power of return. And as we do so, unutterable feelings arise within our hearts, often intensified, in this case, by the pangs of penitential pain. But all this wealth of silent feeling that we are unable to express can find utterance in gratitude to God. They are gone, the human lovers, but He, the source of love, remains. We "trust they live in Him, and there we find them worthier to be loved." And so the thought of love becomes another call to the prayer

of praise—praise of God because He is love. Then there is the more specifically Christian thankfulness for God's love in the redemption of the world, as well as for the many personal and peculiar mercies that we can trace along the course of our individual life. We need not enlarge on these, for our present object is not to emphasise our causes for gratitude, but to indicate that they exist. The pessimist may recognise the existence of beauty and love and virtue, and all the brightness and the joy of life, but he considers them more than neutralised by the moral and physical evil in the world. He regards good and evil as equally involved in the very structure of the universe, viewing them both upon one plane, with the result that he sees no ground for thankfulness in life. And pessimism of this kind is not confined to its professed exponents. It is unduly current in art and literature, and lurks half-articulate, in the background of consciousness, among large sections of society, tainting the common atmosphere of all our life. It is one of the great difficulties that a Christian has to meet. And he meets it, as we have seen above, by viewing good and evil in a very different perspective. He recognises moral evil,

far-reaching as its ramifications, and fearfully complicated as its results have now become, as due, within the limits of our experience, to human self-will, marring the true nature of man. He further considers how large a part of the physical evil in the world is simply the result of moral evil, and therefore to be regarded, like the latter, as part of the human foreground, not the divine background of the picture which the world presents. And these are the two classes of fact on which the pessimist mainly relies, while what residue remains of physical evil lies outside our understanding. We do not know enough about it to gauge either its reality or its significance. It is matter of imaginative conjecture rather than intellectual comprehension, and we cannot consequently argue about it. Since, then, of the total evil in the world, part, as we have pointed out at greater length in a previous chapter, is only assumed to be evil, while the remaining and larger part, of which we have more knowledge, is inextricably involved in our own fault, the Christian is amply justified in denying that the occurrence of evil can in any degree neutralise the positive good in the universe, of which we have actual and accurate experience. Beauty

and love and joy and virtue, and, for its believers, the Christian revelation of God, remain unshaken as solid facts. They are what they are, whatever else may be beside them. And because they are what they are, we have cause to be thankful.

> Were there nothing else
> For which to praise the heavens but only love,
> That only love were cause enough for praise.[1]

This, then, is the proper foundation of prayer; praise of God, because He is love, and thanksgiving for all the ways in which that love has been made manifest to men. At the same time, it must be remembered that such gratitude is by no means so easy of acquisition as it ought to be, and needs, in its earlier stages, all the educative effort that we have described above. Only by degrees, and with much practice, does it grow spontaneous and habitual. But when once it has become habitual it profoundly affects our entire character; for it accustoms us to associate God with all the greatest joys of our life, and thereby not only makes our fundamental thought of God a thought of gladness, but intensifies our whole apprehension of His Being, and relation to ourselves. It thus brightens and exalts and amplifies and corrobo-

[1] Tennyson, "The Gardener's Daughter."

rates our faith. And from this state of mind we naturally, inevitably, pass to the second great object of prayer—"Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done." For in proportion as we realise that God is love, and the sole source of all true loveliness, we must desire the extension of His influence on earth. All our social instincts must point in this direction; all our personal aspirations must take this form. We cannot fail to feel that the one thing needful, the only thing supremely worth our doing, the only true vocation, the only true mission of man is, in his own particular sphere, to proclaim and promote the truth of God, — whether it be in art, or in science, or in literature; in industry, or social intercourse, or conduct of affairs; or whether by direct endeavour to spread religion in the world. And when once this has become the object of our desire, it must necessarily become the object of our prayer. We cannot but pray that God may utilise our lives, according to His will, for the benefit of others; we cannot but pray that He may extend to others the blessing that has brightened ourselves. And so our prayer becomes intercessory. Intercession is apt at first sight to seem more mysterious than other prayer,

because, while we can readily understand that the co-operation of each man's own free-will is an essential condition of his personal ability to receive grace from God, it is not so easy to conceive how or why the action of one man's free-will should influence God's blessing of another. But mysterious though the subject is, there are analogies that at least throw light upon it. For it is a fact of experience that God's government of man is partly effected through human mediation. The man who uses his faculties and capacities aright thereby helps his fellow-men; while the man who misuses them deprives his fellow-men of the help that they might otherwise have had. Nor does this only hold good in secular affairs; on the contrary, it is nowhere more apparent than in spiritual things. The prophet, preacher, teacher, artist who "stirs up the gift that is in him" advances the spiritual life of his fellows by the fact; while the man who might have been such an one, yet wraps his talent in a napkin, leaves his fellows spiritually the poorer. And God allows it to be so. If, then, prayer be the powerful force which we believe it to be, its intercessory operation would be strictly analogous to the other actions of human

free-will, and the use of it a part of that general responsibility which our freedom entails. Moreover, in one respect we are actually able to trace its answer, and that is in the respect of its reaction upon ourselves. For as the habit of praise intensifies our love of God, so the habit of intercession intensifies our love of man. The more we pray for our fellow-men, the more inevitably we yearn to help them; and this yearning quickens our energies and enlarges our capacities for helpfulness, in a way and to an extent that we cannot fail to recognise as part of the answer to our prayer.

Thus the prayer of praise naturally passes into the prayer of intercession; while that, in its turn, as naturally leads us to think of our own obligation to be useful in the world. And it should be noticed that, in the proper order of prayer, it is in this aspect that we first come to think of ourselves; not as gainers, but as givers; not seeking how many blessings we may win for ourselves, but how many we may help to procure for others. Accordingly, when we come to the personal portion of the Lord's Prayer, it is mainly concerned, as we saw, with petitions for enfranchisement from sin; in order to that

union with God which is not only the secret of our personal peace, but also of all our social usefulness. While our single petition for temporal blessings is limited to the very minimum of possible requirement — what we want for the day. This emphasises Christ's warning against anxiety for the morrow, and reminds us that the life of prayer is essentially a life of trust—trust that, if we are in union with God, He will surely give us all that we really need. Indeed, this trust is especially enjoined upon us as the condition of successful prayer. "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." But at the same time that our personal petitions are thus limited, it should be noticed that they include temporal things. For it is sometimes maintained that prayer can only operate in the spiritual region, and not in that which is subject to the reign of material law; or, in another way of putting it, that prayer should only be an effort to accept God's will, as expressed in the laws of His universe, and never an attempt to influence the incidence of those laws. But this distinction between the spiritual and the material spheres is as unphilosophical as it is unchristian. It is unphilosophical, for it

rests on the assumption that the material order is a closed circle, with whose necessary sequence spirit cannot interfere; whereas all the higher philosophy from Aristotle onwards has maintained that the universe is ultimately spiritual, and that matter, as we call it, is a manifestation and an instrument of spirit; while we exemplify the fact every time that our free-will intervenes in the current of events, and should be regarded as insane if we pleaded the opposite opinion in such a practical place as a court of law. But, besides being generally unphilosophical, the distinction in question is more particularly unchristian. For Christianity is the religion of the Incarnation, of spirit manifest in matter, of the Word made flesh. And this, its central doctrine, pervades its every detail, and characterises it through and through. Its foundation, as Christians believe, was accompanied by miracles, expressly designed to prove Christ's mastery of material things. Its teaching was conveyed through parables that gave spiritual significance to all the material objects of the ordinary world. Its practice is sustained by sacraments, wherein material elements are consecrated to the assistance of our spiritual life.

While it bids us venerate and discipline our bodies as being the temples of the Holy Ghost. Its whole purport, in a word, is to realise the truth, which philosophy and common-sense alike have recognised, that the material machinery of the world is subordinate to a spiritual purpose, in whose interest it is meant to be controlled. And it is in natural accordance with this that we are enjoined by Christ to pray for even so material a thing as our daily bread; while, at the same time, the fact of its being made an object of prayer, as well as the limitation itself of the petition, remind us that our daily bread, as well as every other earthly blessing which the phrase may be interpreted to cover, is not to be wasted in selfish enjoyment, but used to sustain and increase the energies that minister, through the body, to our spiritual life. All temporal blessings, therefore, which, under this condition, may be legitimate objects of desire, are also legitimate objects of prayer. And though personal petitions of this kind may diminish, in proportion as our life becomes more spiritual, the confidence with which they are offered will increase.

Thus the Lord's Prayer, when thought out, reveals to us what the life of prayer should be.

And as in the light of the Incarnation we see the true drift and meaning of all the other religions of the world, so in the light of this prayer we see the final cause of the instinct that has always prompted men to pray. The penitential psalms of Babylon, the litanies of Egypt, the hymns of the Vedas and Avesta, the timid incantations of savage races, all have their relative value, and all show that prayer is natural to man. While the unrest of those who live without it was rightly interpreted by St. Augustine as due to the violation of this instinct of our nature: the refusal to seek our rest in God, in whom alone it can be found. Christian prayer, therefore, is the development, the realisation of man's true nature, which is to live in conscious acceptance of, and conscious response to, the love of God, ordering the play of all his energies in the way that that love dictates.

Finally, St. Paul speaks of the Spirit itself making intercession with our spirit; and of Christ as ever living to make intercession for us. These words describe prayer as passing between those whom, in our earthly language, we call the three Persons of the Eternal Trinity;

and suggest to us that our human prayers, while in a measure acts of our free-will, are yet in a greater measure quickened, and inspired, and sustained by God; and that, as in the realm of matter the electric current passes through bodies that are in contact, so in prayer the Divine Spirit circulates through the Christian society, linking us, as we hope that one day it will link us closer still, to the eternal source of all society, the social life of God.

# CHAPTER VIII

## SACRAMENTS

PRAYER, as we have seen above, is the union of the human will with the divine, and as such the natural method of man's communion with God. But prayer, in the Christian religion, is further assisted by sacraments; and that not accidentally but essentially, because it is the religion of the Word made flesh, and therefore necessarily sacramental. Recent research has taught us how very prominent a place sacraments and sacramental rites have occupied in the earlier and simpler religions of the world, especially in the form of sacred ablutions and sacred meals. Ablutions, partly as symbolic of purification and partly as creative of a sense of purity, in preparation for divine service, are of world-wide occurrence. And we now know that sacred meals in connection with sacrifice were the central institutions of most early worship; their object

being to unite the worshippers either with their god, conceived in animal form, or with the sacrifice offered to their god, and thereby also to strengthen their union with one another. These conceptions lost much of their crudity, but retained their essential character, as they passed up into the higher religions of the ancient world. Thus, independently of Judaism, the heathen world in which Christianity arose was widely familiar with the idea of what we now call sacraments. Many of the Fathers, indeed, who did not realise the continuity and connection of all religions, were so seriously perplexed by this fact, that they attributed the Mithraic and other mysteries to diabolic invention, in order to discredit Christianity by a parody of its rites. And, while rejecting their interpretation, we may take it as evidence of the prominence of the usages in question. Thus the sacramental principle is as old as recorded religion, and Christ, while simplifying its application, consecrated it afresh.

The real reason for this is that our body is an integral part of our human personality. All the virtues that we have been considering, prayer itself included, can only find expression through

the agency of nerves and brain. Our body appropriates the elements of the material world, as food; and thereby invests them with capacity for ministration to the spirit, capacity for the service of God. Our body is our avenue of access to the external sphere, in which we have to realise our spiritual life by affording it utterance in action. Our body is, physically, the foundation of the family, the primary unit of society; its various organs are the instruments of all our social intercourse, its various necessities the elementary basis of all our social life. And in consequence of all this our body is the battle-ground of our soul: the place where our temptations meet us, and sins have to be conquered, and holiness achieved. While, finally, our hope of immortality is associated with a spiritual body; "subtle agile," in the ancient language, "impassible and glorious," the obedient organ of an enfranchised will. Nor is the body only related to the spirit as its minister: it further reacts upon our whole personality, and influences our spiritual life on every side; its pleasures and its pains, its diseases and its health furnishing much, if not most, of the material out of which our character

is shaped; while many of its unconscious processes profoundly affect what passes within the domain of consciousness. And it is this intimate implication of what we commonly call body and soul which makes us see the fitness, not to say the necessity, of the Incarnation, for the adequate revelation of God to man, the real union of man with God — since the union of our personality with God must of necessity include the body, which is so integral a part of that personality. Nor can any increase in the spirituality of our religion supersede its necessity for sacramental expression and support. The music of Handel and Beethoven is more spiritual than that of barbarous races, but it is none the less dependent upon the medium of sound. And so as long as we think with brains, and act with hands, and are tempted by the senses, and inspired by melody and song — as long, in a word, as our body is an integral part of our personality — sacraments must remain a medium of our spiritual life, a medium of our union with God.

But all union with God, as we have seen, must start from the side of God. We can only respond to a divine invitation. This, therefore,

is the significance of sacraments. They come to us ordained by Christ as man, and administered by the human society which as man He founded. They appeal to each individual as a divine commandment, coming from without and from beyond himself. And though their object is to convey to us spiritual grace, it is to convey it by bodily means; as to beings whose bodies have an essential part to play in its acceptance, as well as an essential need to be consecrated by its effect.

In considering the place which sacraments occupy in the development of Christian character, it is not necessary to enter into the endless controversies, theological and ecclesiastical, to which their existence has given rise. But a few preliminary remarks will be advisable to make our position clear.

The vast majority of Christians have always been and still are agreed in regarding sacraments as means or instruments of grace, and in using them as such. It is when we attempt to define what may be called the secret of their operation, the precise degree or kind of grace which they convey, or the precise method in which they convey it, that divergent theories begin to arise.

And these theories vary between two extreme poles. At the one extreme there is the view that sacraments act, as it were, magically, by the mere fact of their performance, or in scholastic language, *ex opere operato*. And though this might be supposed to be a popular misconception of the mediæval mind, rather than an accredited doctrine, yet it was an opinion actually maintained by some of the schoolmen, and as such condemned by the Council of Trent; which, though retaining the phrase *opus operatum*, so explained its meaning as to include the necessity for personal faith. But, however little authority this view may have possessed, it was the parent of much practical error, and may be conveniently quoted as marking the extreme limit possible in one direction. At the other extreme lies the theory which, since the time of Zwingli, has been associated with his name, that sacraments are mere symbols of spiritual truth; while all other theories lie between these two, with an inclination in one direction or the other. It would be well, therefore, to bear in mind that all these theories, the extreme and the intermediate alike, are matters of speculation. Whereas the Christian sacraments are practical things; they exist to be

used, and their importance for us consists in their use and not in their explanation. And, as used, they are bodily actions set in a spiritual context. Their material and spiritual elements form together a concrete whole, like our own bodily and spiritual life. But if we isolate either of these elements from their context, they immediately become abstractions, about which we know nothing. Our natural instinct is to regard with reverence all the parts of a sacred whole; but beyond this we can predicate nothing, with any degree of probability, about the sacramental elements taken out of their context, that is, apart from their sacramental use, the specific purpose for which they were ordained. It was the neglect of this truth, by ignorant minds in ignorant ages, that led to materialistic views, and consequently to superstitious uses of the sacraments, as possessing a kind of miraculous efficacy, apart from their appropriate spiritual context; and which, therefore, provoked reaction in the Solifidian or Zwinglian direction. But there is a similar neglect involved in the over-confident assertion that sacraments are merely symbols. For we are now so convinced of the intimacy of what we call spirit and matter, of their close correlation, of

their inextricably involved interdependence upon each other, that we can no longer sharply separate symbols from things symbolised. Such language savours of the Cartesian dualism, which is now a thing of the antiquated past.

> But man, the twofold creature, apprehends
> The twofold manner, in and outwardly,
> And nothing in the world comes single to him,
> A mere itself,—cup, column, or candlestick,
> All patterns of what shall be in the Mount;
> The whole temporal show related royally,
> And built up to eterne significance
> Through the open arms of God.[1]

The unity of nature is more intimate than we once were wont to think; and material symbols are always too much a part of what they symbolise ever to be regarded by a philosophic mind as merely symbols. In one degree or another they must partake of what they express; much as language itself, our universal medium of expression, is no mere collection of counters, as Hobbes would have had us believe, but an active ingredient in the life of thought, which it at once manifests and moulds.

The controversies to which we have alluded were never more acute than in the days of Hooker—the judicious Hooker—and despite of them, he

[1] E. B. Browning, "Aurora Leigh."

was convinced that all Christians are far more at one, in their actual use of the sacraments, than they think—more at one than in their theories about them. We will conclude this point, therefore, by quoting his carefully measured statement of what he thinks the majority of Christians, in their use of the sacraments, believe :—

"That saving grace which Christ originally is or hath for the general good of His whole Church, by sacraments He severally deriveth into every member thereof. Sacraments serve as the instruments of God to that end and purpose, moral instruments the use whereof is in our hands, the effect in His ; for the use we have His express commandment, for the effect His conditional promise ; so that without our obedience to the one, there is of the other no apparent assurance, as contrariwise where the signs and sacraments of His grace are not either through contempt unreceived, or received with contempt, we are not to doubt but that they really give what they promise, and are what they signify. For we take not baptism nor the Eucharist for bare *resemblance* or memorials of things absent, neither for *naked signs* and testimonies assuring us of grace received before, but (as they are

indeed and in verity) for means effectual whereby God, when we take the sacraments, delivereth into our hands that grace available unto eternal life, which grace the sacraments represent or signify."[1]

To return, then, to the use of sacraments in its influence on character: in the first place, they emphasise the fact that our union with God is a gift or grace from the divine side, freely offered for our acceptance; and this is a truth of supreme importance in the present day. For we live in an inventive age, much occupied with its own discoveries, and have naturally therefore the temper of inventors, or discoverers. And amongst other things we have discovered a great deal about what may be called the natural history of religion: its gradual development from crude and simple forms, or, at any rate, its passage through such forms during the period that we can trace; the evolution of its ritual and symbolism; the many coincidences in its different creeds; the illusions that have mingled with and marred its progress; the evil that has so often been done in its name. And as a result of our preoccupation with the human side of all these questions, the divine aspect of the matter is

[1] Hooker, v. lvii. § 5.

frequently ignored; and men speak and write as if religion were a human invention, with no element of revelation behind it. At such a time, therefore, there is an especial value in the existence of institutions which daily remind us that it is not we who discover religion, but religion that discovers us, comes to seek us, finds us out, takes us up into its august arms, and lays solemn responsibilities upon us by the fact. Moreover, it is a critical age, and the tendency of criticism is to make men content with being merely critics, mere "spectators of the universe," in Renan's phrase, "who cannot alter it if they would, and perhaps would not if they could." They weigh alternatives, and balance probabilities, and suspend judgment, and hesitate to commit themselves to definite conclusions, and "lose the name of action." And this danger is very observable in the field of religious criticism; not, of course, in the case of religious critics who are in earnest with their religion; but in the case of the great number who are rather critical than religious; and still more of the uncritical multitude, who are either encouraged in moral apathy or paralysed by mental perplexity, from the common knowledge that Christianity in all its aspects is

undergoing critical examination. And against this attitude of abstention from practice the sacraments are a perpetual safeguard. They exhibit Christianity in action, continuing untroubled on its course. They recall us to the fact that, for all our questioning, we have constructive lives to lead, positive characters to form, definite duties to do. They remind us that there is a great reality, behind the play of criticism, which, if we would be real men, we must approach and appropriate with reverential awe. They are thus a constant witness to the divine action in the world; a constant call to us to consecrate our entire personality, body as well as spirit, to the service of God. And when we say that they emphasise and remind us of these truths, it is only as part of their total effect upon our whole character that they do so. For, as the means of grace which Christians believe them to be, they uplift and unite not only our minds, but our hearts and wills and bodies, with all their unconscious processes, to God in Christ; and so reproduce in us, according to our capacity, as determined by our faithfulness, the Incarnate life, the life of God made manifest in flesh, the life which St. Paul describes as Christ

being "formed in us," and which enabled Him to say, "I live; yet not I, Christ liveth in me."

Again, sacraments are not only offered to us, but they require to be accepted by us. They thus create a specifically religious duty, incumbent upon us because we are Christians. They call upon us to carry our religion out into the realm of fact, not merely in our general conduct, but by definitely religious acts, whose obligation upon us is entirely due to our believing what we do believe. And this gives a definiteness to our religion which is of infinite importance in an age that tends to be indefinite, and therefore invertebrate, in all matters of religious belief. Those who use sacraments must feel and show that their religion is a practical reality to them. And this fact reacts upon both their personal and social life, quickening their efforts after personal holiness, and intensifying their desire to be of spiritual use in the world. Sacraments are thus a gateway through which we are led to realise our Christianity in the region of action. And we have a strong negative proof of this in the tendency of nominal and half-hearted Christians to abstain from the sacraments; due to the uneasy feeling that they will otherwise be committed to

something for which they are unprepared; involved in responsibilities which they are unready to assume, in a word, that they will have to be inconveniently in earnest with their religion.

So far we have been considering the action of sacraments upon the individual person, or, more accurately, upon the individual side of our personality. But they are also the visible bonds of our corporate Christian life; and this is no less essential a part of their total significance. They are offered to every man afresh, by a society that existed before he was born; they enlist him among its members, and maintain him in its fellowship; they assure his participation in the common prayers and common sympathy that communion with the Christian Church involves—the Church which takes the infant up into its arms, and confirms the young, and blesses the married, and visits the sick, and buries the dead; the Church which has been so truly called "the home of the lonely." And this union with the Christian society is of the very essence of the Christian life.

We have already noticed the social nature of our personality, and its consequent necessity for realising itself in and through other persons. And it is to this need, in its Christian form, that

the Church responds. It is the society through which the individual Christian can fully realise his Christianity, and find it reflected; the only society in which he can move securely in the full assurance that all his fellows will be actuated by the same motive, the same "love of the brethren" as himself; and from which, therefore, he may look with confidence for a response to his love. He is swept into the current of its larger life; there to find his intellect illuminated by its teaching, his will stimulated by its saintly examples, his emotions quickened in its atmosphere of love; to be helped in his temptations, supported in his failures, soothed in his sorrows, sustained in his success; and in all these ways assisted by the action of his fellow-Christians to fuller union with their common Head—"in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord."

And then there is the other side of the picture. As each individual person can only realise himself in the society of others, so the latent possibilities of that society can only be realised in the total aggregate of its members; when every one, that is to say, has fulfilled his part, performed his particular function, rendered his unique service,

made his "peculiar difference" felt; and so, in realising himself, assisted the realisation of the social whole. Such is the law of all human societies; but its highest manifestation is in the Christian Church, as being the body of Christ, who, in St. Paul's language, "filleth all in all," or, as Origen reads and renders it, "in all is being fulfilled." Each individual in whom the Spirit of Christ dwells will reflect a fraction of that fulness, with his own "peculiar difference"; but only in the complete society, where all differences unite to enrich the whole, can the total fulness be made manifest, and Christ, in this sense, be adequately realised.

> What, if even God
> Were chiefly God by living out Himself
> To an individualism of the Infinite
> Eterne, intense, profuse?[1]

Thus the Church is not merely the medium in which the Christian realises his own life, but it is the society whose corporate existence and communion constitutes that life.

Such is our ideal; though in the present sinful world it is only, and can be only, realised in fragments—fragments which, from the very fact of their being such, can afford no adequate

[1] E. B. Browning, "Aurora Leigh."

conception of what the completed whole may one day be. Still, even in these fragments, it is realised to an extent and in a degree of which mere outside spectators are wholly unaware; and through this partial realisation the Christian character is formed, the Christian life inspired, the Christian mission to the world maintained; and sacraments and sacramental ordinances have thus a further influence upon Christian personality, as being the means and manifestation of its social development and corporate life.

These, then, are the essential ways in which sacraments assist our Christian life toward its aim—the union of our personality with God. But incidentally they have further effects. For the influence of the sacraments, however we number them, is not limited to their strict number: it overflows beyond them, and touches with its consecration the places where they are administered, and the rites with which they are performed, and the music and the art that have in ages gathered round them, and all the material things that are subservient to their use. And so they lead us on to view all the world as sacramental; in a way which, so far from materialising our religion, as is sometimes mistakenly supposed,

accustoms us to spiritualise our secular life. For one of the great dangers of that life is practical materialism, and it was never a greater danger than it is to-day. For various characteristics of the age make in this direction.

To begin with, it is a commercial age, in which wealth is highly valued; and wealth leads, in the average, to luxury of life. Gold and jewels, dress and amusement, costly entertainments and magnificent display, are as eagerly pursued as ever in any bygone time; while their pursuit is even less tempered by any admixture of idealism than it has sometimes been. Meanwhile, at the opposite end of the social scale, the pressure of the struggle for existence is intensified by the conditions of modern industry and commerce, with their ever-increasing keenness of competition. And this inevitably tends to concentrate the attention of the poor upon the material necessities of livelihood; while such absorption in the things of sense naturally increases the temptations to sensuality, by which rich and poor are brutalised alike. Moreover, these social conditions are further complicated by the intellectual atmosphere of the day. For our preoccupation with physical science of every description, noble

as it is in itself, often leads to an ignoble estimate—since human nature is what it is—of the relative importance of material things. We see this reflected in the general tone of much of the popular literature. Our physiological psychology, for instance, may not be technically materialistic, when accurately taught, but it imparts a materialistic bias to many inaccurate minds. And popular novels and reviews, whose ethical influence, however shallow, is immensely wide, spread the evil by interpreting thought and emotion in physiological terms. And other sciences have similar effects, not from any error in themselves, but because they are misused by a public opinion whose wish is father to its thought, and which is only too glad to have it so. Hence, too, the utilitarian aspect of science, its mechanical ministry to our comfort and convenience and commercial success, is popularly valued out of all proportion to its speculative interest, its power being preferred to its truth.

But precisely because our modern materialism is of this kind, because so much of it arises from the perversion of things which are in themselves valuable and true, it can only be counteracted

by restoring these things to their proper use. We, with the results of our commerce and our science all around us, can never regard the material world as an illusion, or as a thing to be ignored. And, if we would correct the foul abuse of it, we must do so by exhibiting its nobler use—the power of beauty, and art, and wealth, and scientific invention, and political success to alleviate sin and sorrow and further the spiritual progress of man. And one of the means by which such teaching has been conveyed in the past is, beyond question, the sacramental system of the Church, with all those external adjuncts which that system has gathered round it, pointing, like a great cathedral, through material to spiritual things. Sacramentalism exhibits vividly and openly, *coram populo*, the fact that spirit is the final cause of matter, the end in which matter finds its meaning and truth. It is therefore in its essence a standing protest against materialism, a standing witness to the true significance of secular life,—

> That a twofold world
> Must go to a perfect cosmos. Natural things
> And spiritual,—who separates those two
> In art, in morals, or the social drift,
> Tears up the bond of nature and brings death,
> Paints futile pictures, writes unreal verse,

> Leads vulgar days, deals ignorantly with man,
> Is wrong, in short, at all points.[1]

Finally, a sacramental religion has a natural influence upon the manners. For by bringing our bodies into constant connection with spiritual realities, it naturally affects their behaviour. And though this may seem to some a trivial thing to mention in our present context, it is not really so; for behaviour has a more powerful reaction upon character than men often suppose. True, there may be great social polish on the surface of a corrupt society, behind which a man may "smile and smile and be a villain," hard of heart and coarse in thought; a politeness which makes vice easier by robbing it of its grossness, and is justly therefore suspect. But Christian good manners are the converse of this: they work from within outwards, and are the external reflection of interior truth and love. And such manners are intimately connected with the reverence which gathers round a sacramental system. We find great stress laid upon this reverence by the writers and teachers of the early Church—reverence for all sacred places, and sacred occasions, and sacred functions. "Men should pray,"

[1] E. B. Browning, "Aurora Leigh."

says Cyprian, "in a controlled voice, expressive of modesty and quietude." "Not uplifting even their hands in an extravagant fashion, but with proper moderation," says Tertullian. "Not bringing the emotional manner of the theatre into church," adds Chrysostom, "where angels are present at the holy table, and surround it with awe." And from the church this temperance of demeanour would naturally spread to the home and social life. We find a striking instance of this in Clement of Alexandria, who lays great stress in his *Tutor*, or *Treatise on Christian Education*, upon bodily behaviour. Thus he emphasises the importance of seemliness at meals, restraint in the manner of eating and drinking, moderation in speech and gesture, simplicity in furniture and entertainments, decency in dress, proper courtesy between men and women, general decorum. And all this from the same high principle which led our own spiritual-minded Andrewes, in a later age, to make his "postures and gestures" a subject of prayer; because the bodies of Christians are living sacraments, temples of the Holy Ghost, manifestations of the indwelling Spirit of the Word made flesh.

# CHAPTER IX

## MYSTICISM

We have spoken of prayer and sacrament as means of union with God, and of the Christian life as consisting in that union. But it is obvious that such union, between a finite personality, in a state of development, and an infinite Being, must be progressive, and progressive through limitless degrees. Hence the phrase will seem to have different meanings according to the stages of the progress which it describes.

In the first place, the union in question must begin with a desire for its own existence. The soul must be "athirst for God, yea, even for the living God." And this desire, in the last analysis, must come from God, by what is technically called His prevenient or antecedent grace; who, in the words of the Gregorian collect, "by Thy special grace preventing us, dost

put into our minds good desires" (*praeveniendo adspiras*).

It should perhaps be remarked in passing that there is nothing in this term "prevenient grace" to favour the Calvinistic doctrine of irresistible and indefectible grace, which practically denied human freedom in order to preserve the divine omnipotence. Such theological determinism is precisely parallel to the physical determinism of the materialist. Both alike deny a fact of experience — the freedom of the human will — because it conflicts with the requirements of a preconceived theory. And though to say God is omnipotent, therefore man cannot be free, may sound more reverent, it is no more true than saying "Nature is uniform, therefore man cannot be free." It involves an abstract and arbitrary conception of omnipotence. Whereas the Christian view is that God, by calling finite free-will into existence, voluntarily limits Himself to the extent that He allows that free-will to act; while such voluntary self-limitation is obviously no infringement of omnipotence.

It is only a natural consequence, then, of our dependence as creatures upon our Creator, that our desire for God should be inspired by Him, or

due to His grace. And this would seem to be the meaning of Christ's words when He says: "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him,"—words which an early mystic, author of *The German Theology*, explains as follows:—"By the Father, I understand the Perfect, Simple Good, which is All and above All, and without which and besides which there is no true Substance, no true Good, and without which no good work ever was or will be done. And in that it is All, it must be All and above All . . . When somewhat of this Perfect Good is discovered and revealed within the soul of man, as it were in a glance or flash, the soul conceiveth a longing to approach unto the Perfect Goodness, and unite herself with the Father. And the stronger this yearning groweth, the more is revealed unto her; and the more is revealed unto her, the more is she drawn toward the Father, and her desire quickened. Thus is the soul drawn and quickened into a union with the Eternal Goodness. And this is the drawing of the Father, and thus the soul is taught of Him who draweth her unto Himself, that she cannot enter into a union with Him except she come unto Him by the life of Christ."

But if our desire for God is inspired by God, it must spring from a corresponding desire on His part for us, a desire that we should desire Him. "We love him, because he first loved us."

Thus the initial stage of union with God is our desire for Him, interpreted as evidence that He also desires us; though, of course, we only know by experience the human side of this desire, which we believe to be mutual; the divine side is a matter of faith, and of the various reasons by which faith, as we have seen, is justified.

This desire, then, acts upon the will, and issues in practical obedience to God's will, as expressed in the particular condition and circumstances of our life, read in the light of the Christian revelation. And it is by the preservation and increase of this obedience, amid the chances and changes of life, that our will is gradually united to God. But here again we only know by experience the human side of the case. We know the temptations that we are resisting, the self-denial that we are practising, the virtuous efforts that we are making. And we believe that in all this we are doing God's will, and that, as in the case of desire, His will anticipates ours; that it is God that worketh in us, both to will and to do of His

good pleasure. Still, all this is a matter of faith, however cogent the reasons for that faith may be.

But "he that willeth to do shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God." Progressive obedience reacts upon the intellect, and brings progressive insight—insight into the reality of the spiritual life, insight into the power of prayer, insight into the truth of the Christian revelation; and consequent conviction, that as Christians we are in union with God,—that is to say that, with the progress of our Christian life, faith tends to gain the character of assurance. We are increasingly sure of God's co-operation in our life.

Here, then, we begin to pass beyond our own desires and actions, and to apprehend the presence of Another who is not ourself. But still it is an assurance of faith valid only for its possessor. However strong our conviction of divine guidance may be, we cannot prove its reality to other men: it is private, personal, incommunicable, a hidden life.

Thus, desire leads to obedience, and obedience to insight, and insight to assurance which grows gradually stronger—assurance that we are not only striving to serve God, but that He is actually

"ruling in our hearts." And this is the normal limit of the Christian consciousness, the furthest extent to which we can speak of being in union with God.

But there is a further stage of mystical experience described by many of the Christian saints, though by no means peculiar to Christians, in which they have felt their union with God to be an immediate fact, an intuition, a vision, a supersensible certainty, involving them for the time being in rapture, or ecstasy, or trance. The occurrence of this phenomenon is undoubted, and we have no more right to explain it away, as a pathological illusion, than we have to explain away the reality of all spiritual life, on the ground of its material accompaniments. Nor, of course, has the Christian any desire to explain it away. For the ordinary course of earnest Christian life tends, as we have seen, to a progressive assurance of God's presence in the soul, which reaches its climax in solemn moments of profound prayer, or sacramental communion. And we can well believe that, in rare cases of exalted spirituality, these moments attain a transcendent character, in which conviction becomes intuition, and ordinary consciousness is arrested for the time;

since the latent possibilities of human nature are not limited to its normal condition, as the meteoric appearance of supreme genius shows; and this is nowhere more true than in the spiritual life, which is full of surprises at its every turn. While regarding the matter from its other side, we have no reason to doubt that God, who habitually makes His presence felt in the sense of assurance that we have described, may on occasion reveal Himself more fully, for particular reasons, to particular souls. Thus the mystical experience in question would be what its subjects have always believed — a momentary earnest and anticipation of that conscious union with God which is the goal of all our faith and hope; though an anticipation which, as occurring under mortal conditions, must still be supposed to fall far short of the state described by St. Paul and St. John as "seeing His face," "seeing Him as He is," and "knowing as we ourselves are known."

As the word "mystical," by which this condition is usually described, is a term that is very vaguely and often inaccurately used, with a consequent confusion of thought, it may be worth while to call attention to its proper meaning. Mysticism, whether the word implies a closing

of the eyes to outward things, in order to be undistracted from the inward vision, or a closing of the lips, to meditate in silence over a secret that no words can express, is primarily a philosophical term. As such it denotes the belief that the human spirit is capable of an immediate apprehension of absolute being or reality; an apprehension, that is to say, which is not inferential, but intuitive; without intermediate stages, and therefore incapable of explanation, but for the same reason infallibly sure. For the certainty which rests on personal experience is at once the strongest and most secret of all. I am certain of the existence of an object that I have seen, or a friend with whom I have "taken sweet counsel," but I cannot convey this certainty to another, who has not had the like experience with myself. Thus the immediacy and consequent incommunicableness of our knowledge of absolute being or reality is the essential point of philosophic mysticism. And religious mysticism is only the religious application of this general principle; or, to phrase it otherwise, it is the same doctrine, expressed in theological terms; the belief, to put it in the simplest possible words, that the soul is capable of immediate union or

communion with God. But while the point of interest in this relationship, for the philosopher or theologian, is its immediacy, or the fact that it is an actual experience, the point on which popular opinion fastens is its incommunicableness, which is a secondary, and one might almost say accidental, consequence of the former. Hence anything obscure, or mysterious, or above average comprehension is apt to be called mystical; whereas the word properly denotes only the immediacy of the relation between the human spirit and ultimate reality; while the term "mystic" includes both the philosopher who theoretically maintains this and the saint who practically acquires it.

But it is with the latter that we are now concerned. It will be obvious from what precedes that there will be various kinds of mysticism corresponding to the various conceptions of Absolute Being or God. Some writers indeed confine the application of the name to those systems of thought, such as the Vedantic and the Neo-Platonic, in which the Absolute is conceived in terms and reached by methods of negation. But as a matter of fact the word is more widely used, as descriptive of an element in all religion; and it is more in accordance with general usage, as well as simpler, to

limit its connotation, as above, to the single point of immediate apprehension; and regard its practical character as determined by, and therefore varying with, the particular theology to which it is attached. And of these it will be sufficient for our present purpose to contrast two extreme cases.

At one extreme there is the Indian conception of the Absolute—and mysticism historically appeared first in India—the conception that there is one impersonal Being which is the sole reality; and that all the multiplicity of finite things, including our human thoughts and wills and passions, is unreal and illusory, because it separates us from the absolute unity. Consequently, if we would attain union with the Absolute, we must obliterate all our finite characteristics, all that gives variety and distinction to our life; and we shall then intuitively recognise that the pure self, which exists behind all these diversities, but has no longer any particular determinations, to distinguish it from pure nothing, is one with the Absolute—like a drop of water which has fallen back and lost its separate identity and attributes in the ocean.

We have no need here to discuss this doctrine,

or the various forms which it has taken. Our only object is to indicate that mystic union with an impersonal Absolute can only be sought by obliteration of all that distinguishes our human personality as such; and conversely that all attempts to seek union with God by this negative method logically involve the assumption that He is impersonal.

The extreme opposite of this doctrine is that of the Personality of God as conceived by Christianity. We may explain this to mean either that God is much more than what we call personal, but at least includes in Himself all the essential attributes of personality; or that human personality, in its present stage of development, is the mere germ or potentiality of a mode of being which is only completely realised in God; though the latter, which Lotze approves, is, for various reasons, the more satisfactory mode of statement. And I have traced at length elsewhere, how Christianity deepened our sense of the significance of human personality, and thereby rendered it a more adequate category under which to conceive of the Divine. Now, while it is of the essence of the Indian pantheism, as we have seen, to exclude the many from the one, and

allow reality only to the latter, it is of the essence of personality to include the many in the one, as the means of its realisation. We see this in our own case. As persons we are units, individual selves, face to face with a multiplicity of other persons and things. And we grow and develop, as we have already seen, by spiritually incorporating these others in ourselves. We assimilate persons, who are at first alien to us, in fellowship and friendship, and utilise their capacities and receive and reciprocate their love. We learn the various sciences, which are at first outside and unintelligible to us, and so make them our own. We enrich our imagination by appropriating all the varieties of art. And so we gradually realise ourselves by including more and more of the world's multiplicity within the sphere of our own unity, and thus making the many one; while, given time and opportunity, we can foresee no limit to the range which this development may take. Meanwhile, at the root of it all is the will. It is a continual process of self-affirmation, of self-emphasis, of the will to be; and as such the diametrical opposite of the self-obliteration that we have described above.

Such, then, is personality as we know it in

ourselves—a mode of being which is progressively realised in another. Consequently, if we conceive of God, in unitarian fashion, as simply one, it would be difficult to think of Him as personal; since in that case His only other would be the world of relative and finite persons and things; and we should therefore be obliged to conceive of Him as attaining realisation through their means; and His absoluteness would disappear. There would be no absolute; which is inconceivable. But the Christian doctrine of the Trinity relieves us from this difficulty, by enabling us to conceive of God as personal, without at the same time derogating from His absolute character. For according to that doctrine the Persons of the Godhead are eternally realised in and through each other; and the essentials of personal relationship are thus comprised within the Absolute. Thus the Divine Unity, in the Christian conception, is not maintained by abstraction from all multiplicity, but is of that personal character which necessarily includes plurality within Itself. Hence, too, It is able to gather finite persons into Its embrace, by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, reproducing in them the life of Christ. But the

result is union, and not unity. The creature, that is to say, cannot be conceived of as ever identified with, or absorbed in, the substance of his Creator; nor does the Creator, as some Hegelians say, come to the consciousness of Himself through the creature. But Creator and creature are united, while retaining their respective characters, by the free action of mutual love. And, as long as this distinction is kept in view, we may speak of God realising Himself in man, and of man as finding his only complete realisation in union with God.

Now we have already seen that a man may desire God, and even endeavour to keep His commandments, or do His will, without having as yet attained thereby to any consciousness of a divine response. But as soon as that consciousness comes, whether in prayer, or sacrament, or sense of providential guidance, and faith begins, as we have described above, to be confirmed by experience, the resulting state may be called mystical; since it involves a conviction of personal communion with God, of contact, in one degree or another, with divine reality. All Christian life, therefore, which is sustained by this conviction is mystical at heart; though it

is only those who have brought this mystical element into exceptional prominence that are ordinarily called mystics. Still, it should be remembered that the latter, as in the parallel case of asceticism, are only the typical representatives of a principle that is present in all Christian experience.

Christian mysticism, then, as being founded on the mutual love of persons, should, both in theory and practice, be as far removed as possible from that of India, or the Neo-Platonists; both of which conceive the divine unity to involve the negation of all positive predicates, and endeavour to reach it by a corresponding abstraction from all the distinctive characteristics of personality. Whereas the Christian thinks of God under the very definite and positive category of personality, and therefore seeks union with Him, as a person with a person; that is to say, not by the obliteration, but by the emphasis of all the essential energies of human personality, reason, will, love, and a bodily condition that shall be adequate to their expression; while, in turn, he looks to find all these energies quickened by the indwelling Spirit of God; with the result that God may be made manifest in Him, while

he is realised in God. We have a striking instance of this when we compare the characters of St. Paul and St. John. Both were men the basis of whose life was profoundly mystical; but the effect of this was not to reduce them to any uniformity of type, but to emphasise their difference, by stimulating their individual characteristics, and thus to enable each of them to make God manifest with his own "peculiar difference." And so it has been through all subsequent history. The greatest saints have always been the men of most marked individuality; because their union with God has enabled them to utilise their energies to the utmost, and each has in consequence reflected a different ray of the divine light upon the world. And such is always the result of mysticism that is founded upon personal love—to make men real, definite, effective, expansive, practical, intense; whereas the mysticism of abstraction withdraws men from the world, to be, in the language of Neo-Platonism, "alone with the Alone."

But the same thing has happened in the course of history to Christian mysticism that we have already seen occurring in the case of asceticism. The positive mysticism of love has been

infected both in its theory and its practice by the negative mysticism of abstraction, which rests, as we have seen, upon a totally different foundation. The main cause of this was probably practical, and connected with the similar mistake about asceticism. For the union of a sinful being with God must, as we have seen, begin with a negative movement, namely, the negation of his sin; and as so much of that sin is connected with the body, this will involve the suppression of many bodily appetites and passions and desires and imaginations. And in the stress and strain of the consequent conflict it is very easy to confuse between the body itself and the self-will of which it is the all too facile instrument; and to regard both alike as intrinsically evil, and equally to be suppressed. This, as we have seen, is a danger into which asceticism has continually fallen. But when once we regard the body itself as a hindrance to union with God, as the prison rather than the organ of the soul, we are on the negative road, the road of abstraction, the road that ultimately leads to the belief that God is only to be found by turning our back upon His creation. Not only sinful desires must then be given up, but all desires, since all desires

have come to seem relatively sinful, and any human interest and affection a barrier, instead of a step, to union with God. And once embarked on this negative method, we are led logically onward. No longer only the body, but art and literature and science and policy and secular affairs, all come to be viewed as distracting to the spiritual life. While, of necessity, the conception of God grows correspondingly negative and abstract, since it is determined by the exclusion of all those objects of experience which form our only material for positive thought. Much of this negative tendency was probably, as we have said, of practical origin, and connected with the struggles of an ascetic life, which, by attempting to annihilate the body, inevitably increased its apparent opposition to the spirit. But it found a natural ally and vehicle of theoretic expression in the Neo-Platonic formulæ, which had passed into Christian theology with the writings of the pseudo-Dionysius, and been further familiarised by Scotus Erigena. And the result was to give an abstract bias to most of the leading Christian mystics. Of these perhaps the best-known groups are the French school of Bernard and the St. Victors; the Spanish St.

Theresa and St. John of the Cross; and later the German school of Eckhart, Tauler, and Suso.

These groups differ very much in tone and temperament, but all afford instances to our point. Love is the central thought of Bernard and the St. Victors, and the former took an active part in all the affairs of his age. Yet we find him saying, "To lose thyself in a way, as if ceasing to exist, to be no longer conscious of thyself, to be emptied of thyself, and, as far as possible, annihilated, this is to have thy conversation in heaven"; and again, when speaking of God's will perfected in man, "to be so affected is to be deified" (*deificari*). And Hugh and Richard of St. Victor have much to the same effect; and are plainly influenced by Dionysius, on whom the former wrote a commentary. In the Spaniards there is less theory; they were practical and indefatigable workers in the cause of monastic reform, and their love is all aglow with Southern ardour. But both in their theory and practice they over-emphasise "detachment" in order to union with God. "It seems," says St. Theresa, "our Lord wishes that we should separate ourselves from everything, that so His Majesty may draw us nearer to Himself"; and again, "It

is useful to take great care when we have an affection for any object, to turn our thoughts away from it, and to fix them on God"; on which a suggestive commentary follows: "Oh! if we religious did but understand what harm we receive, by frequently conversing with our relations, how we should shun them."

But it is in the German school of Eckhart and his followers that all these tendencies find their fullest speculative expression. The eternal or essential Godhead, according to Eckhart, is unknown and unknowable, not only to men but to Itself, an impersonal Unity, of which the persons of the Trinity are the manifestation. And union with God is only to be attained by a process of decease: dying to self, dying even to the desire for God; knowing nothing, willing nothing, having nothing; that God may fill this utter emptiness, and so make it one with Himself, —also expressed as the Father bringing forth His Son in the soul. And Tauler preaches to the same effect: "If man is really to become one with God, then all his faculties, even those of the inner man, must die and be silent; the will must become will-less, the understanding void of knowledge, the memory and other faculties

divested of all content . . . because they are not God alone."

Now men and women like St. Bernard, St. Theresa, and Tauler were, of course, among the foremost Christian influences of their age: practical, energetic, and full of positive and personal love of God. When, therefore, we find them using language like the above, we can hardly, in fairness to them, say more than that they are exaggerating a principle which is undoubtedly recognised by Christianity; while the exaggeration is not only a very natural consequence of their impetuous fervour, but is so absorbed in the heat of that fervour as to lose most of its harm. But the fact remains that the possibility of this particular exaggeration is due to the ease, with which the strictly Christian principle could be confused with another which was always in the air, but which was fundamentally alien, as we have seen, to the true spirit of Christ. And the real danger of the exaggeration is only apparent when it comes to be imitated and emphasised by men of smaller spirituality and narrower mind; for it then imports an element of serious falsehood into Christian ethics, and one which is an acute source of

distress and perplexity to sensitive souls. We cannot, therefore, lay too much stress upon the radical distinction between the mysticism of abstraction, which is Oriental and Greek, and the mysticism of Christianity, which is founded upon the mutual love of persons, and animated by the spirit which Coleridge has expressed in well-known words :

> He prayeth best, who loveth best
> All things both great and small ;
> For the dear God who loveth us,
> He made and loveth all.

# CHAPTER X

## CHRISTIAN LIFE SUPERNATURAL

THE Christian life and character, as above described, is often called supernatural; and as this use of the term is sometimes misunderstood, it may be well to conclude with a consideration of its meaning. Aristotle drew a clear distinction, in the early days of philosophy, between two senses in which we use the word nature (*φύσις*). "In one sense," he says, "we apply the term 'nature' to the elementary material of things which possess a capacity for development; and in another sense to their ideal end"—the thing, that is to say, which they are destined to become. And among other illustrations of this distinction, he instances the family and the state. The primitive family is a "natural" institution in the former sense, as being the first expression of man's social instinct, the raw material, as it were, out of which society is made; while the civilised

state is equally "natural" in the latter sense, as being the rational end, in which the social instinct finds its ultimate realisation. "For," he adds, "whatever a thing is, when the process of its development has been completed, that we call the nature of the thing, whether it be a man, or a horse, or a house." And so, at a later period, the Stoics identified life according to nature with life according to right reason, or the immanent purpose of nature. This is the very converse of the theory with which Rousseau and his followers confused the intellect of the eighteenth century, when contrasting the artificiality of civilisation with the state of nature. For in their indignation at what they regarded as the perverse lines on which man had conducted his development, they failed to see that in one way or another he must inevitably develop; and hence identified his natural state with the primitive simplicity which Aristotle would have called his elementary condition. But our modern views of development are more true to history, and have brought us nearer again to Aristotle. We now speak of the nature of man as including not only what he actually is, at any given time, but also what he potentially is, or has it in him

to become. And from this point of view we can appreciate the objection raised against the word "supernatural" as being superfluous; since whatever height of moral and spiritual attainment man may reach must be contained, it is contended, within the possibilities of his nature, and should therefore be called natural. Indeed, we have been maintaining all along that man's true nature is to realise himself in God, and that all the unrest of godlessness arises from its being a violation of that nature. But it does not follow from this that the term "supernatural" can be dispensed with, since there is another point of view to be kept in mind. The whole process of man's self-realisation, as we have seen, depends upon God's initiative, and is sustained from moment to moment by God. His true nature is to become a vehicle for God's revelation of Himself, and in this sense an instrument for God's self-realisation in him. From this point of view, then, the whole process may fitly be called supernatural, in the sense that man's nature is governed and guided by Another and a higher Being than himself; it is not self-supported, but upheld from above. Human progress, in other words, depends upon the

concurrence of two wills, the human and the divine; and has, consequently, a double aspect which needs two terms for its description. In so far as it springs from the action of man's will it may be called natural; and at the same time supernatural, to the extent that the human will is influenced by the divine. And this distinction is further emphasised by the sinfulness of man. For as the result of that sinfulness man is doubly dependent upon the divine assistance. He is what St. Paul calls psychical, as distinct from spiritual; what St. Jerome renders "the animal," and our English translators "the natural" man; the man in whom the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and who cannot discern spiritual things; the double-minded man, who is unstable in all his ways. And he finds no remedy in himself for this condition of things, but only in God who "giveth" him the victory. Hence the term "supernatural" appropriately describes the Christian life and character; as being grounded on the divine forgiveness of sin, sustained by the indwelling presence of the Divine Spirit, and guided to a union with God which can only come about as a divine grace or gift.

Moreover, this truth, which is only the

summary of all that we have been saying in the previous chapters, especially needs emphasis in the present day. For men are easily affected by their atmosphere, and there is a tendency in the modern atmosphere to regard man's ethical development as simply natural, in the sense of being due to the normal operation of his ordinary faculties. This is, of course, only a particular application of that general mode of thought which is nowadays called naturalism. Naturalism, strictly speaking, is neither more nor less than materialism, and, as such, we are not here concerned with it. But it has, so to speak, widely overflowed its banks, with the result that many Theists, and even Christians, are unconsciously biassed by naturalistic tendencies, which they have not consistently thought out, and could not think out, without landing themselves in hopeless intellectual confusion.

One instance of this is the facile acquiescence of many minds in the very vague application of the term evolution to history, under cover of which human nature is supposed to "move upward working out the beast" by processes more or less analogous to those by which animal and vegetable organisms are pro-

gressively adapted to more complex functions. But this is a very superficial view of history, and totally ignores the fact that the moral progress which has been at the root of all the other kinds of progress, among what are called the progressive peoples, has been laboriously achieved by Christian effort. That is to say, it has been the work of the very men who have been the strongest believers in their own supernatural assistance, the strongest disbelievers in any human ability to live without it; and whose supreme success ought to gain them credit for a true insight into its conditions. Unless, therefore, these men were sustained in their lives of devotion and deaths of martyrdom by a fundamental and highly improbable delusion, they are standing examples of the very fact which naturalism denies. In other words, the phenomenon of human progress has, in its ultimate analysis, been the result of intellectual error or of superhuman supervision, and is in neither case analogous to physiological evolution. And men must, at any rate, face this alternative clearly before talking loosely about the evolution of morality.

Another instance of the same naturalistic

influence is seen in the widespread tendency of men who are otherwise Theists to deny the divinity of Christ. It seems to them simpler and more natural to regard Him merely as a great religious genius, who was the first that fully realised the spiritual capacities of mankind; and the specific evidence upon the point is coloured accordingly by this naturalistic prepossession. But they fail to see that in thus, as they think, simplifying the conception of Christ they are complicating the problem of humanity. The fact is that we have grown so accustomed to our own human nature as to take for granted that we know more about it than we really do. But man, with his mysterious origin and unknown destiny, his great capacities and small achievements, his sins and sorrows, hopes and fears, presents an insoluble enigma; unless the light thrown upon his existence by a divine Christ be true. So far, therefore, from rendering our total problem more intelligible by assimilating Christ to other men, we render it less so, by abandoning the only clue to its solution that we possess. And the case is very similar with those Christians who, while accepting the divinity of Christ, endeavour to naturalise,

as far as possible, all the events and conditions of His history. Whether this is done to conciliate others or to satisfy themselves, it betrays the influence of presuppositions, which, if consistently thought out, would invalidate the claim of the Christian religion and the Christian life to be, in the sense which we have defined, supernatural.

But the objections to a revelation and a life that comes to us from above are not only intellectual, they are also not infrequently moral; a fact which the Christian Church has always maintained, and which is only a particular instance of a general principle to which modern psychology gives full recognition. In saying this one is not referring to obvious immorality, whose vitiating action upon the intellect none would deny, but to those subtler and half-unconscious tendencies which are really ethical in origin, though they need critical examination before their true nature can be seen. These, arising from various causes, are characterised by a common disinclination towards the moral attitude which the acceptance of a revelation involves. We love to discover, to invent, to investigate, to create our own circumstances, to

carve out our own future, or, in words that we have so often had occasion to use, to affirm or realise ourselves. And this temper revolts from the recognition of a work done for us, which we could not do, from the acceptance of a revelation made to us, that we can only partly comprehend, and must therefore receive in an attitude of obedience that is humbling to human pride.

And yet it follows, from what we have been saying, that the Christian revelation satisfies all that is right and true in this very instinct that prompts men to reject it, as nothing else has ever done, or can ever do. For what is this instinct of self-affirmation? It is the desire to attain reality, and the permanence which reality involves; the desire to become real, to satisfy our capacity for knowing, by the possession of true knowledge, our capacity for willing, by the effectual achievement of our will, our capacity for loving, by communion with adequate objects of love; in a word, to make all that is at present potential in us actual. And this instinct is the source of all human endeavour. Pleasure, excitement, riches, knowledge, honour, power, influence, rank, and all the earthly aims of ordinary men are pursued for the reality and substance

which they seem to give, and in their measure do give, to life. It is the same with social intercourse, friendship, love; they are all means of becoming real. While the same is the case again on the higher plane of morality. Duty, work, philanthropy, self-sacrifice for others are all affirmations of our reality in the world, and react upon our consciousness as such. In fact, we are only now describing, in terms of reality, what we have previously described in terms of life. For to live is to be real, and desire for life is desire for reality. Moreover, behind all the partial desires of a man, his personality or self is present; and it is not merely the satisfaction of his single capacities for pleasure or knowledge or any other object that he seeks, but the satisfaction of himself through those capacities. He may, indeed, take a low view of himself and seek correspondingly low satisfaction, but it is still for his "self" as he knows it, his personality, that he seeks realisation. And this "self," this person, is a spiritual being, though it may be only at the cost of a bitter negative induction that most men come to recognise the fact. The reality, therefore, which, as persons, we seek must be ultimately spiritual, and cannot, when thought

out, be any other than God, the most real being of philosophy (*ens realissimum*), the source and sum of all reality.

Further, it stands to reason that union with God, however earnestly men may seek it, must in the last resort, as we have seen throughout the foregoing pages, come as a gift. The finite and inferior cannot command the infinite and superior Being. He can only accept Him, and that on His own conditions. And this is in strict analogy with all else that happens in life. For, as St. Paul asks, "What hast thou that thou hast not received?" All our capacities are gifts; we find ourselves in possession of them, but did not create them; and the objects which satisfy them, and the opportunities for their satisfaction, are equally gifts. They must exist before we can utilise them, and we cannot control their existence. The self-made man, as we call him, is only the man who has successfully used his gifts. When men therefore resent a revelation as an affront to their independence, they forget what the nature of that independence is; that it is created and conditioned by God. God in creating us has given us all that we at present possess, and amongst other things that fundamental desire for

self-realisation which, when analysed, means union with Himself. It is antecedently probable therefore, not to say a rational necessity, that He should satisfy the desire which He has called into existence, and so complete His creation, by the revelation of Himself. "We will come and make our abode with Him." And it is in harmony with the created, and therefore given character of our whole being that we should find its completion in the acceptance of such a gift.

Again, as we have seen, the self which we instinctively desire to realise is not merely an individual but a social self, a being whose nature it is to depend upon others, and find its true life in their response. And from this point of view dependence may be said to be as essential to us as affirmation; or, in other words, reliance upon what others give us. We see this best in its highest manifestation, namely, love. If we could compel the love of another, it would no longer be free, and therefore no longer love. Its whole value for us consists in its being a free gift. And it is as a gift, as something that we could not compel, or command, or create for ourselves, but can only accept with gratitude, that we esteem it. And here too we are met by the same desire for

reality and permanence. Our need of dependence is only relatively satisfied by other human beings. For they are finite, and as such inevitably come short of full reality. They are partial, they are imperfect, they disappoint, they die, while we instinctively crave Another, to whom none of these accidents occur—One upon whom we may absolutely and not only partially depend, because He is absolutely real, "the same yesterday, to-day, and forever." And we crave this not only for ourselves, but for all the finite objects of our affection, in order that they too may thus gain the reality which, because we love them, we desire them to possess. But if our social instinct is to be thus satisfied, it must still be by a gift. We need to feel, as with human beings, the response of a free will to our desire, a love that will satisfy our need of dependence, because it is no mode of oneself, but the gift of Another. And the Christian revelation is at once the fact and the assurance of such a gift.

Nor is a revelation and a supernatural life in any way discordant with our modern views of evolution as understood by Theists. We have, indeed, already had occasion to notice how loosely the term evolution is often used. And there is a

theory of evolution, if it can be dignified with the name of a theory, according to which the entire universe, the sum total of all existing things, has been gradually evolved, from lower and simpler forms, passing back at last into some primitive potentiality of which we have now no knowledge. On the face of it this is pure materialism; but it is combined in some minds with the conception of an immanent God who is included in the universal process, and gradually grows conscious of Himself in its course.

Now, other objections apart, such a process as this is absolutely inconceivable, in the sense of unthinkable and meaningless. We cannot construe our language upon the subject into thought, for it violates a fundamental law of thought, that nothing can come out of nothingness—"*ex nihilo nihil fit.*" Since, on the hypothesis in question, at every fresh stage of existence something arises out of nothing, something which was not in the premisses appears in the conclusion, something which had not previously existed came into existence, being arose out of nothing. And to speak, in this case, of the higher being potentially present in the lower is only to conceal the absence of real thought under a phrase. For we cannot

think of a potentiality as either existing or realising itself at all, without the assistance of something other than itself and actual. Aristotle saw this clearly when he laid down the canon that "the actual must precede the potential" (*προτερόν ἐστιν ἐνέργεια δυνάμεως*), and "the perfect being comes before the germ" (*τὸ πρῶτον οὐ σπέρμα ἐστὶν ἀλλὰ τὸ τέλειον*). And in this, as in so many other points, he is the master of those who know. For subsequent idealism has recognised this principle as axiomatic.

Thus, in contrast with the absolutely inconceivable process of universal evolution as above described, we can perfectly well conceive a divine reason, which is already actual, presiding over the evolutionary process, and eliciting its higher from its lower stages, as being alike the creator of both. There are obvious limits to our present comprehension of such a process, but it is conceivable in the sense of thinkable, since it is analogous to the creative activity of our own reason, as it is exercised every day.

But on this hypothesis, which is that of all Theism, the Christian revelation, with all that it involves, is no anomaly, no isolated and exceptional intervention, no breach in the continuity of

the world's development. For created existence is itself a gift to the creature, and every fresh modification of that existence a fresh gift, inasmuch as it all comes from the creator. We may confine our attention to the method in which these gifts are conveyed, and call it evolution; but there is another point of view, from which it is creation, all the while. The chemical and electrical qualities of the world's material basis, the additional capacities of vegetable life, the instincts, and sensations, and rudimentary thoughts of the animal world, are all, from this point of view, gifts, howsoever conveyed; and each is appropriate to the function which its recipient is destined to perform. And so when we come to man, his reason and conscience, however slowly developed, are equally gifts, as we have already noticed, but gifts which entail the necessity of a fresh gift. For while all the previous kinds of gifts are, from the nature of their respective recipients, as far as we know, accepted blindly, human consciousness at once recognises itself as a gift, and thenceforth desires to know its giver. We need not enlarge again upon the various forms which this desire takes, or the degree of intensity in which it culminates. Our only object

is to point out that, if this desire is satisfied by fresh gifts, the gift of revelation, the gift of the Son of God, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the supernatural life which He enables, this is strictly in accordance with all that has preceded. There is no real breach of continuity or change of method between the days of creation and the day of Pentecost. But "every good gift, and every perfect boon, is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom can be no variation, neither shadow that is cast by turning." We only think otherwise from our habit of drawing a false distinction between "the natural" and "the supernatural"; as if all ordinary things and events were natural, and only certain extraordinary ones, if any, supernatural. Whereas the true distinction is not between two classes of things, but two points of view; all the things that we call natural, because they occur in a way with which we are familiar, being at the same time supernatural, as having their origin in God. And our common mistake upon the subject is, in the Christian view, simply a result of the sin which distorts our intellect as much as our will, and thereby blinds us to the omnipresence of God. The more we overcome sin the more we

recognise that we only do so by God's grace or gift, or, in other words, by supernatural assistance; while at the same time we feel that our new life is but the fulfilment of our true nature, the earnest of that which God created us, through union with Himself, to become, when "the process of our development is complete."

THE END

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